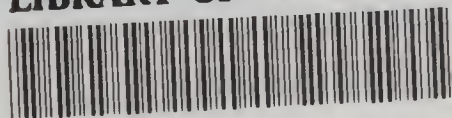


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BOTH WERE YOUNG

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And Both Were Young

By Reita Lambert:

LINES TO A LADY
THE NOBLE ART
THEY WHO HAVE
AND BOTH WERE YOUNG

*And
Both Were Young*

*By
Reita Lambert*
//



*"And both were young,
and one was beautiful"*

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BOSTON 1938 NEW YORK

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To My Daughter
PEGGY

And Both Were Young

Chapter 1

THE THOUGHT THAT STRUCK JUDD WHEN HE met her that first morning on the beach was that, in a world of human beings all conceived on the same plan, one could be so utterly, so miraculously, so divinely different. She was a medium-sized, sun-bronzed girl wearing the briefest of white bathing suits and a white rubber cap. She had been playing beach ball and it was in her pursuit of the bounding rubber sphere that she had reached Judd and Cliff before the others.

Flushed and breathless, hugging the ball against the curve of her slender waist, she acknowledged Cliff Sidney's introduction to his friend and college mate, Judd Harcott. "She is young," Cliff said kindly, "but the little girl has possibilities."

She was, as Cliff said, young. The lashes that fringed her gray-green eyes curled up and back like a child's. Her short nose was in the process of peeling, her smile was frank and sweet as a child's. But her real "difference" lay in some vibrant quality of her spirit. She made Judd think of a runner poised on tiptoe—waiting for the signal—

“What,” he asked her, “did Cliff say your name was?”

“Lora—without the U,” she said. “Just L O R A.”

He nodded, smiling, his eyes not moving from hers. “I like that. I’ve never known a Lora without the U before,” he said.

Then Cliff came up with other girls and they surrounded the newcomer, chattering, inspecting, approving; “Here’s the new man— isn’t he lovely! Darling, he’s almost too beautiful—are you sure he has a nice disposition? Well, his mother told us he was wonderful.”

For Judd’s mother and father had already been in Forks Harbor for over a month. It was due to the persuasion of Cliff Sidney—whose family had been coming to the Harbor since before he was born—that they had deserted their Adirondack camp. Cliff and Judd had become inseparable friends during their three years at college, they planned to make the “grand tour” of Europe together after their graduation next June and this summer Cliff had wanted to show Judd off to his Forks Harbor friends. So the Harcotts had taken the Herris cottage and then Judd had blandly informed them that he and Cliff had decided to take a bit of a cruise in Cliff’s thirty foot cruiser and would join them later at the Harbor.

This had a little dismayed his parents, but it had given Mrs. Harcott a month in which to prepare a

brand new audience for the advent of her only son. Thus while Forks Harbor listened to accounts of Judd's superior endowments—mental, physical and spiritual—Judd himself was cruising lazily along the coast, wearing a pair of disreputable duck pants and nothing else, shaving once a week, adding to his repertoire of mildly risqué stories and in general giving his mother the lie.

But now those paradisaic days were over. Clean and brown and hard as a rain-washed boulder, he faced his inquisitors on the Forks Harbor Beach. He posed and flexed his muscles and gravely catalogued his qualifications as an applicant to that exclusive summer colony. The morning contingent of old ladies, knitting and sewing on the rocks in the background, surveyed the scene with horror and drew the customary unflattering comparisons between the youth of their own day and these modern savages.

Lora did not take part in the inquisition. She stood on the edge of the group, her eyes lively, her mouth still smiling. But she and Judd were conscious of each other, already in secret communication. He knew, when she turned and strolled down the beach, that *she* knew he was thinking of her, that he would follow her. And, fifteen minutes later, they were sitting side by side on the raft, the July sun beating harmlessly on their tanned bodies. Lora had taken off her cap and Judd realized that he had known

her hair would be like this—thick and curly and short and the shade of pale amber. A little darker and she'd have been a strawberry blonde, he thought.

She said, "I believe you deliberately waited until the summer was half over so you could make a dramatic entrance."

"Well, I got a pretty good hand, didn't I?" he said.

"That was just the clique," she said. "Your mother has been building you up ever since she came—'My son Judd!'—in capitals."

"That's going to be pretty hard to live down," he said.

"Well, you're the first new family we've had at the Harbor for five years," she said. "The first new one that's had any eligible males to offer. That ought to be a help." She leaned back, resting her weight on her spread palms. "And of course physically you're the answer to every girl's prayer."

"To yours?"

"I should say so!"

"Good. The others don't count. And now that the formalities have been observed," he said and fished in an imaginary pocket for an imaginary pad and pencil and pretended to write, "Let's get down to business. Your last name, please—not that I expect to use it but it's necessary for the records."

"Paris."

His brows went up. "Paris! Like the city all good Americans go to die in?" She nodded and he said, "Okay. Age?"

"Need you ask?" she said. "Look at my white hairs. I'll be a sophomore in September."

"In college! Oh, well, we'll skip that. Color—lovely. Sex—absolutely. Tastes?"

"Terrible," she said. "I adore the funnies and Leslie Howard and chocolate ice cream and I hate gin and Dickens and cigarettes—"

"Those are adolescent failings from which you will recover," he said. "And now for the most important question of all—is there a man in your life?"

She made her eyes big. "I should hope so! I have a father and a brother—"

"Relatives don't count," he said sternly.

She laughed and inspected a small tear in her bathing cap. "Oh. I see what you mean. Well, now, let me think—"

"Good! If you have to think the answer is no," he said.

This was the summer of nineteen-thirty-three; this was the regulation tone of the prelude to friendship between the young of that depraved era. Judd and Lora observed the rules as a matter of course, but underneath the mock solemn interchange, an older, subtler contact had been established. It was nothing that the eye could see, nothing for which the

world has yet found a name, but it was there. Lora, who had liked and played with boys all her life, found that this boy fitted into none of the emotional niches occupied by her other masculine friends. Judd, who had had his heart broken three separate times and then prudently locked up the pieces, discovered that it was whole again and beating strongly. He thought, justifying that wild flutter in his breast, "Oh, well, I haven't seen a girl in six weeks—" for he had still another year of college ahead of him and an important job waiting when he had got his degree. But Lora, as was her habit, gave herself recklessly to that moment; in which suddenly the world seemed lovelier and life sweeter than they ever had before.

When Judd and Cliff walked back along the beach to their lunch, Cliff said, "No doubt the Paris child has unsuspected charms—I wouldn't recognize them because I've known her since I was four—but if you *could* spread yourself a little thinner, the other girls'd appreciate it."

"Since you were four!" Judd said and looked with new respect on his friend.

"That was the first summer her family came to the Harbor. Her mother used to let me roll her carriage on the beach sometimes as a very special favor." He clucked reminiscently. "Lordy, she was a red baby!"

Judd didn't laugh. He said, "Funny, mother mentioned about every one of those girls in her letters except Lora."

Cliff gave him a sidewise glance. "Well, Lora's kind of on the little side—easy to overlook."

But these two were too close for an evasion to pass unnoticed. Judd knew at once that it was an evasion. He said quickly, "Don't be subtle. What's the matter with her?"

"Not a thing—Lora's a swell kid. Her folks are swell, too, only, if your mother's fussy about such things, she might object to the fact that Lora's father's a tailor. I don't mean he actually sits cross-legged on a bench and sews things himself, and he has more money than most of his customers, but he's definitely what is known as a tradesman."

Judd was no snob but this did startle him a little. "A tailor!"

"Darned good tailor, too—has a very swanky 'emporium,' George Paris. If you'd lived in New York, you'd know the name and he'd probably have made your first tux—he made mine. As a matter of fact, still does—makes dad's too."

Judd was thinking of the tailor's daughter who, he thought, could easily have passed for the daughter of any proud crested prince. He recalled that she had seemed an integral part of that gay group on the beach and said, his thoughts reverting to his

mother, "Well, your family accepts her, don't they? They don't hold it against her that—"

"Lord, no!" Cliff said. "It was dad who got them up here in the first place—kind of sponsored them. We've played around together—twenty or more of us—all our lives, grown up together, you might say." Then he added carelessly, "In the summer, I mean."

Judd looked at him. "You mean you don't play around with her in town?"

"Never happen to run into her."

"I see," Judd said coldly and quickened his steps.

Cliff hurried after him. "Don't be a damn fool! I didn't edit the Social Register and I don't make out people's invitation lists. If I don't happen to see Lora Paris in town, it's because she doesn't go to the same places or do the same things I do. And I suppose *that's* because her father's a tailor and mine's a Judge. I didn't arrange things that way, but there they are."

There they were. And now Judd knew why his mother hadn't mentioned Lora in her letters. Mrs. Harcott *was* a little fussy about such things.

But Mrs. Paris mentioned Judd to Lora. At lunch she said, "Well, I understand the magnificent Judd Harcott has arrived at last. Is he a nice boy?"

"He must be the world's eighth wonder," said

Mr. Paris who had heard about Mrs. Harcott's eulogies.

"He's a prince," young Hay Paris said in his raspy, almost fifteen-year-old voice. "Listen, you ought to hear him tell about the time the *Reckless* ran into that tornado off Nassau and lost their mainsail and their food got all water-soaked and they didn't have anything to eat or drink all the next day till this big yacht sighted 'em—"

So it was not necessary for Lora to answer her mother's question.

The young crowd accepted Judd as their parents had already accepted Judd's father and mother. This was something of a triumph, for the Harbor was not quick to accept newcomers. But the Harcotts ideally fulfilled the slightly finical exactions of the Summer Colony which prided itself on being exclusive but not fast, well to do but not showy, conservative but not prudish. Most of the summer cottages at the Harbor had been owned and occupied by the same families for many years. Changes were invariably deplored, especially by the mothers of growing children. Because, they said, one "wrong" family would be enough to upset the traditions established by the right ones. A good many Harborites could well remember the flurry good-natured Judge Sidney had caused them when he had recommended the place to his New York tailor. But George Paris

and his pleasant, tactful wife had soon proved themselves to be a gentle, likable couple, as "particular" about their children's morals and manners as the most fastidious among them.

The Harcotts were not like the Parises, of course. Mr. Harcott was a prosperous banker, his wife's family had been in the Boston Social Register for three generations. They were a little stand-offish, but that merely emphasized their eligibility. And Judd was the right kind of young man. He swam, danced and played tennis as well, but no better, than the other young men. He was handsome—thick, ruddy brown hair, ruddy brown eyes, a straight, steely strong body—but no handsomer than many mothers' sons. He had an ingratiating way with old people and children and still managed to be popular with his contemporaries. Even before all these facts were apparent, Mrs. Paris had declared him a decided asset. She said as much to Mr. Paris at the Saturday night boat club dance on the evening of his arrival, "I think Judd Harcott is going to be a decided asset."

"Lora appears to think so, too," Mr. Paris said.

Lora and Judd were dancing together at the moment. His head was bent to hers, she was looking up into his eyes, but they did not seem to be talking. Even as Mr. Paris watched them, they seemed, without words, to reach some decision. They stopped

dancing and turned and went out through the open French window that gave on the porch.

Mrs. Paris said, "She does, doesn't she? Well, I'm rather glad. I was beginning to think she was immune—"

Lora and Judd sat down on the porch steps. The porch borrowed a little light from the windows of the club and a little from the richly starred sky. It was a welcome change from the brightly lighted ball-room. "Nice," Lora said, "Much better than dancing," though she loved to dance.

Judd agreed. "You bet. This is swell."

Beyond the beach and the pier, the sea was black save for the riding lights of anchored boats and a circlet of more distant lights. Lora pointed to them. "That's the Sweetmans' yacht out there."

"Must be some boat," Judd said.

"It's marvellous. They put in here every summer for a week or so. They're terribly rich."

He said, "I'll bet they are," and then, in a lower voice, "I've been looking forward to this all afternoon, Lora Paris."

"To seeing the Sweetmans' yacht?"

"You know that's not what I mean."

She laughed shyly, not looking at him. "What *do* you mean?"

"Well, if you just want to hear me say it, to seeing you again."

She had wanted to hear him say it. Up to that point they might have been two strangers meeting at a sick friend's bed. The easy camaraderie of that morning on the beach had gone with the sun. He had been startled to find how changed she was in her evening dress. It was a diaphanous affair of sea green chiffon and the long, trailing skirts made her seem taller, older, more slender. Her bright hair was brushed close to her head, held off her face by a wreath of tiny white rosebuds. Her lips were rouged and there was a film of powder on her sun-burnt nose and cheeks.

He had looked different to Lora, too, in his white flannels and blue coat. She had told him so. "I'd hardly have known you."

"Clothes do make a difference," he had said and they had both tried to laugh.

All afternoon she had said to herself, a kind of song, "I'll see him tonight! I'll see him at the dance! I'll dance with him!" And it had come about exactly as she had foreseen, except for this strangeness. What had happened to them so naturally and beautifully on the beach that morning, made them shy of each other in the conventional atmosphere of evening dress and artificial lights and the calculated rhythm of dance music.

But, after they had sat for a few moments on the porch, talking a little, often silent, the strangeness

lifted. The music drifted out to them, dissolved in the salty evening air. Now and then someone came out to ask Lora to dance but she said no, later, perhaps, it was too warm—”

She said suddenly to Judd, “I was just thinking—it’s almost August. Summer is nearly over.” She had never thought that before, never thought that August meant summer was nearly over.

“And to think,” he said, “that I might have been up here for a month.”

She said simply, “I wish you had been.”

“So do I. If I’d known—” there he stopped and turned and looked at her. “If I’d known you were here, I would have been.”

She drew a filmy chiffon handkerchief through and through her fingers. “Well, we—you’ve still got a month—a little over a month, really.”

He said, “I know a way you could help me make up for lost time.”

“Tell me how.”

“You’ll think this has a fresh and nutty flavor,” he said and grinned a little sheepishly as though he thought so, too, “but if you’ll give me the rest of the summer—kind of take me on as a special chore—go places, do things with me—”

He stopped and she laughed. “You’re terribly rash. You’d probably get sick and tired of the sight of me.”

"You know darn well I wouldn't."

"I *don't* know," she said and looked at him. The laughter went out of her face when she saw how gravely and intently his eyes were fixed upon her. "You don't know either—how could you?"

"Don't ask me. I just know. How about you?"

Lora didn't know how about her. She was suddenly frightened of the things they were not saying and, as suddenly, her fears were gone and the magic of the morning was back. Every familiar sight and sound took on a new, and dazzling beauty, a new meaning. Her senses rang with the joy and wonder of it for nothing like this had ever happened to her before—perhaps nothing like this would ever happen to her again. And so she said in a quick and breathless little voice, "Well, I—I guess I might risk it."

And Judd said, "Okay!" and they smiled shakily at each other through the thin white light.

Chapter 2

IT WAS A HOT AUGUST NIGHT AND MR. AND MRS. Paris were sitting on the side porch when the Harcotts drove in. Mrs. Paris was surprised. She had not expected the Harcotts to call. She had met them at the club, played in a bridge tournament with them, but she had not expected them to call. "Why, I believe it's the Harcotts, dear," she said and laid down her knitting and went to meet them.

Mrs. Harcott said, "We were driving by and you looked so cool in here—our house isn't getting a vestige of this lovely breeze."

"Well, that's a break for us," George Paris said affably. "Come and sit down. How about a drink? I've got some pretty fair Scotch."

But Mr. Harcott declined the Scotch. "I'm too fat to drink whiskey on a night like this."

"There's plenty of gingerale on the ice," Mrs. Paris said. "You'll both have some gingerale, I know." And, as she seated her guests, she said, "It isn't often as warm as this at the Harbor."

"Now, now! Where have I heard that before?" Mr. Harcott said and they all laughed.

George brought out the gingerale and a plate of sugar cookies and presently the two men were smoking and talking politics. Neither was deeply interested in the subject but they had little else in common. Julia Paris and Mrs. Harcott were not much better off. Mrs. Harcott was a little on the civic-conscience, club-woman type; slightly heavy as to build and manner, impeccably groomed and coiffed, an excellent talker. Julia, in spite of the fact that her hair was nearly white, looked younger than her forty-eight years. She had kept her slender figure, her cheeks were pink, her blue eyes bright and eager. Her interests were chiefly domestic; she thought George the best husband and Lora and Hay the finest children in the world. But, being a sensible woman, she was also a sensible mother. She had preached the gospel of simplicity and honesty to her children and that they were simple, honest children was traceable to this and to the fact that she herself practiced what she preached. Julia Paris was, in short, a contented woman and looked it.

"One would never believe you were the mother of an eighteen year old daughter," Mrs. Harcott said now. "Your Lora is eighteen, isn't she?"

"Eighteen and a half," Julia said.

"Still, she's just a little girl after all—still in college, isn't she?"

"Yes, she's at Lockwood. A sophomore next year."

"And my big boy has another year to go," Mrs. Harcott said and sipped her gingerale.

"Yes, Lora told me," Julia passed the cookies, took one herself. "My husband and I think your Judd's a pretty fine boy."

Mrs. Harcott laughed. "You've certainly had plenty of opportunity to observe him. It seems to me he's here more than he is at home."

"We love having him. As a matter of fact, he's not really here much—just while he's waiting for Lora to dress. She's at the pokey age, you know."

"I see. They're out together tonight, aren't they?"

"Yes. They've gone to the movies, I think."

"Well," Mrs. Harcott said, "as I was saying to Bailey this morning, we mustn't begrudge him his fun this summer. He'll have very little time to play during the next few years—very little time for anything but hard work. His father's putting him in our New York branch when he comes back from Europe next fall."

"How nice!"

"Oh, it won't be much of a position at first—Bailey believes every boy should carve out his own future—not have things made too soft for him. He's going to pay Judd exactly what he would pay any other inexperienced beginner—which means that he'll be practically a pauper for a few years." She smiled across at Julia. "But a single man can man-

age on very little these days and Judd isn't the type that marries early, thank goodness." She shook her beautifully coiffed head and sighed. "These early marriages—I don't approve of them at all, do you? Disastrous in nine cases out of ten—"

The firm, well-bred voice went on and on and now Julia Paris understood what it was trying to say to her. She went quite cold with indignation and disgust. To put that construction on a boy and girl friendship! So that was why the Harcotts had called—to warn them to call off Lora!

"I don't know what you call an early marriage," she said wickedly. "I was married at nineteen." She smiled blandly on her guest. "And it wasn't exactly disastrous!"

"Oh, but everything was so utterly different then," Mrs. Harcott said, suave and light. "Young people were so different in our day—so much more responsible and grown up, don't you think?"

"Good gracious, no! I think we were dreadful little saps—if you'll forgive the word—repressed, sly, sentimental, muddle-headed little saps." She stopped to laugh, a little dismayed by what she had said and the way she had said it. Then she added, "Why, Lora has more sound sense at eighteen than I had at twenty-five."

It was a moment or two before Mrs. Harcott replied. She took a long drink of gingerale, nibbled a

cookie. Julia found that her stomach was shaking and envied the admirable self-control displayed by Judd's mother.

That lady said at last with a humorous lift of nicely arched brows. "Well, I wish I had as much confidence in Judd. But he's a very intense, romantic nature—too susceptible for his own good, I'm afraid—not that any sensible girl is going to take a boy of that age seriously."

"Meaning," Julia thought wrothily, "that even if he is rushing Lora *she* isn't to take him seriously!" Aloud she said lightly, "Well, that's fortunate, isn't it?"

And Mrs. Harcott replied, "Fortunate for all concerned. Bailey's really a very indulgent father but I can easily imagine him cutting Judd off with the proverbial shilling if he were to do anything silly—get himself involved in any premature love affair." She looked straight at Julia. "It would be love in an attic for them with a vengeance, I'm afraid."

Julia was by nature a direct, plain-spoken woman, unversed in the art of innuendo. It took all her control *not* to say, "Thanks for the warning," but she bit back the words and managed a smile as nonchalant as Mrs. Harcott's. She said, "That should protect him, shouldn't it? Love in an attic isn't the modern girl's idea of married bliss—or so I gather from hearing Lora and her friends discuss the mari-

tal state. They not only reject the attic but insist on all the modern conveniences—”

But after the Harcotts had left and George Paris had had his yawn out, his wife repeated that conversation. The evening had closed in, it was dark there on the porch. She could not see her husband's face and he did not speak until she wound up her story with an indignant “What sort of parents do they think we are!”

But instead of betraying anger or shock, George's voice was grave. “I don't know. Maybe we're the kind they think we are.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I've been thinking those two kids were getting a little too thick for their own good,” he said. “Every day and every day, morning and night—he's practically the only boy she's been out with for the past three weeks. Maybe you hadn't noticed that.”

“Of course I've noticed. He's her first crush—and he's a nice boy. A dear boy. Every girl has to go through this sort of thing sooner or later and I'd rather it would be with Judd than some of the others.”

He said dryly, “Judd's mother doesn't think as well of Lora as you do of Judd.”

“She wouldn't think well of any girl he was interested in, probably.”

“She might,” he said, out of the obscuring dark-

ness, "if she thought the girl was good enough for him."

"Good enough for him!" She glared at the darker shadow of his figure. And now she was glad he couldn't see her. For he was right. Suddenly she knew that as clearly as though Mrs. Harcott had told her in that firm, nicely modulated voice of hers, "No tailor's daughter is good enough for my son!"

Julia clamped her teeth together. It would be like a woman of that type, a newcomer, to make a point of something the Harbor had accepted for seventeen summers. She said this to George in a voice full of scorn.

George said, "Yes, but her case is a little different. None of the other boys has fallen in love with Lora. If it came to anything as serious as that, their parents might object, too." And at her cry of disbelief, he said, "Oh, they've been pleasant enough summer neighbors—why shouldn't they be? Lora's been as well brought up and educated as any of the rest of the kids and I've kept their boat club off the rocks—they can afford to let the bars down for three months in the year, let their kids play with ours just as we let Hay play with Zeb's boys." Zeb was a "native" who supplied the Harborites with fresh fish. "But you notice they don't cultivate us in town any more than we'd cultivate Zeb."

Julia's indignation had given place to confusion.

It was true that the Harborites did not "cultivate" the Parises in town. Lora did not see her summer playmates from September to June. She had never minded that, probably never thought of it. Neither had Julia. They had their own friends, their own busy lives to lead.

George was saying, "Maybe it was a mistake to keep on coming up here. It was all right when she was a child but now she's growing up—"

He stopped and lit a cigarette. The tip glowed red as an evil red eye through the thick summer night. Now that she was older, she might fall in love with some boy whose parents would think her not good enough for him! "It's sickening," she said. "As though *we*—but it's too silly. Not worth worrying about. They'll both be back in college in another few weeks."

George said mildly, "Well, maybe you better have a little talk with Lora. We don't want any unpleasantness after all these years."

"Don't worry! I'll talk to her! But I'm not going to tell her the real reason Mrs. Harcott objects to her. She's never thought of such things in her life—I'm not going to make her class conscious now." And, after a little she added savagely, "It's insulting! Intolerable! I hate that woman. I knew the minute she came up on the porch that she was an arrogant snob! I *hate* her!"

She was ready for bed, in her nightgown and negligee, when she heard Lora come in. She waited a moment and then knocked on her daughter's door.

"May I come in, darling?"

Lora was sitting on the side of her bed. She had made no attempt yet to undress. Her white flannel coat still lay across her shoulders. Her gray eyes were wide and luminous, her hair curled in sea damp ringlets against her flushed cheeks. She blinked a little when her mother came in. "Oh! Hello, mum! You still up?"

"I should ask you that!" Julia said lightly. "A little girl like you keeping such hours—why, it's midnight and after."

"I know, darling. We meant to come home ages ago but after the movie—it was such a wonderful night—we went down and sat on the rocks." Her eyes gazed past her mother in dreamy reminiscence. "The moon on the sea was so heavenly and it was all so quiet and lovely—"

"It must have been," her mother said. She wanted to turn and go out. She felt an intruder, felt oddly abashed in the presence of such innocent ecstasy. But she knew that now, indeed, she must stay, say what she had come to say. She stooped and kissed the girl's cheek. "I don't really mind, darling. I wasn't worried—only—were you and Judd alone on the beach?"

"I think so. I didn't see anyone else."

Julia sat down on the bed, took her daughter's hand. "Darling, don't you think it would look a little better—be a little kinder, too—if you didn't concentrate on Judd quite so much?"

Lora turned and looked at her, frowning. "Kinder?"

"I mean—what's become of your old crowd—Cliff and Royal and Earle and the girls? Aren't you afraid they'll be hurt if you spend all your time with one boy?"

"I hadn't thought of them—you see we have so little time, mother. He'll be going so soon."

"You mean Judd? But so will all of you, my precious. You'll all be leaving." She gave a little laugh. "That's all the more reason why you shouldn't neglect your old friends."

"I think they understand," Lora said.

"Understand what, dear?"

"That—that Judd and I want to be together."

Now Julia recognized the change in her child. She wondered how she could have been blind to it before. It was so appallingly obvious. It was in the girl's voice, in her wide, rapt eyes. Even her body seemed to have been remolded, planed down and refined by some secret process of the spirit.

"But, darling," she said, feeling more inadequate than she had ever felt in her life. "I don't think you *should* be together so much. After all—"

"I love him, mother." Lora lifted her head. Her color had faded, her face was aglow with a white radiance. "We love each other. I was going to tell you soon but I—I couldn't talk about it just yet. It's so wonderful—I never knew anything could be so wonderful."

Julia's heart sank. She warned herself, "Easy, now!" reminding herself that she was supposed to be a modern, understanding parent. "Well!" she said. "This is a surprise! When did it happen?"

"The first day—the day he and Cliff came. I met him on the beach. I think we both knew—even then."

"Love at first sight!"

Lora looked quickly at her mother. "Yes. You're not laughing, mother!"

"Good heavens, I shouldn't dream of doing such a thing!" Julia said. "I remember too well what I suffered the first time I fell in love—or, rather, the first time I thought I was in love."

"Judd and I don't think. We *know*!"

Julia said indulgently, "My sweet, you're just a little girl and this is your first romance—mind, I'm not scolding you. Every girl goes through this sort of thing sooner or later—it's all a part of growing up. But you mustn't take it too seriously. My goodness, you'll probably be in and out of love half a dozen times before the right man comes along."

"Oh!" Lora stood up. Her coat slipped to the

floor and she stood rigid in her long white dress and looked at her mother with hot, indignant eyes. "How can you say anything so horrible!"

"Lora!"

"It is horrible! It—it's indecent. If I thought that, I'd loathe myself. If I thought I could ever love another man the way I love Judd, I'd—I'd rather die!"

"Now you're talking melodramatic nonsense," Julia said. "I admit Judd is a nice boy. I'm not surprised that you like him. But love! You've known him only a couple of weeks—and you're little more than children. What can either of you know about *love*?"

"But love isn't something you learn," Lora said, her eyes fixed, solemn and anxious on her mother's face. "It just happens. The way it did with Judd and me. We didn't ask for it, it just happened."

"What happened," Julia said lightly, "happens to nearly every normal boy and girl. Fortunately, *I* understand that—but I'm afraid Mrs. Harcott doesn't. That's why I thought it best to speak to you about it."

"Mrs. Harcott! Judd's mother?"

"She came over here tonight ostensibly to share our breeze but really to let us know that she doesn't approve of Judd's seeing so much of you." Lora sat down in the chair beside her dressing table and

her mother went and put an arm around the girl's shoulders. "Oh, she was civil enough but she made it very clear that she doesn't like this affair at all." Julia laughed and stroked her daughter's fair hair. "The whole thing is utterly absurd of course. The idea of her getting all wrought up over an innocent vacation friendship. She evidently hasn't as much confidence in that boy of hers as I have in my girl."

Lora's small cold hands closed convulsively on her mother's. "It isn't just a vacation friendship, mother. You don't understand—"

"Don't be trite, darling. Of course I understand. It's because I *do* understand that I'm going to ask you not to go out alone with Judd again."

"But, *mother!*"

"I mean it! If I'd had any idea this thing had gone so far, I'd have put a stop to it long ago." She had determined that she would not lose her patience, but that interview with Mrs. Harcott had worn her self-control too thin to bear the further strain of knowing that that admirable woman's warning had come too late. "You're not to see him again," she repeated, firmly. "When you're a little older and know a little more about life, you'll understand why and thank me."

Lora said nothing, just stood there rigid and colorless as a little ghost. Julia went as far as the door,

forced herself to go back and kiss her daughter's cheek. "Now, go to bed—it's frightfully late. Good night, dear!"

But when she went back to her own room, she felt frustrated and terribly depressed. She sat down on her bed and told George about it; "Of course, I pretended it was nothing serious—I didn't want to make a big issue of it. But it *is* serious—I never dreamed—if you could have seen her face when she told me—"

"Joan of Arc hearing her voices, eh?" George Paris said. He had been sitting up in bed reading and waiting to hear the result of that interview. He reached across and patted his wife's hand. "I suppose that's the way love is at eighteen."

Julia said grimly. "Yes. It can be such a terrible thing—or such a wonderful thing. Only we can't let it happen to her—not with Judd." Her hands fisted. "It might have been better to tell her the truth—tell her why they object to her! That might have roused her pride at least."

George asked gently. "What *did* you tell her?"

She gave him a bitter smile. "Lies. I talked like a Noel Coward heroine. You'd have been surprised—but not half as shocked as your modern daughter was."

"Love," George said, "is easily shocked. It's a very old-fashioned emotion. But she's young. She'll

get over it and next summer, if I can get away, we'll take her abroad."

And, on the porch of the Herris cottage, in the thin light of the waning moon, Judd was facing his own private tribunal. Bailey Harcott had looked dubious when his wife had announced her intention of speaking to their son. He had said, "Better not. Why not let it ride? He'll be back in college soon and if he *is* interested in the girl, it's just calf love. But if you start criticizing her—"

"Heavens!" Marie Harcott said and lifted her brows. "Do you really believe me capable of anything so primitive? Naturally that would be the worst thing we could possibly do."

"Then, how the dickens—"

"I'm going to say just enough to make the whole affair—and the girl too—appear ridiculous to him. And don't worry, it will! Modern youngsters aren't the sentimentalists we were, my dear."

This was pretty subtle for Mr. Harcott. In his opinion, if a boy was making a fool of himself he should be told so in so many words. That's the way *his* father would have handled the business. But perhaps the modern methods were a little more genteel.

And so Mrs. Harcott was saying to Judd now, in a voice that was at once affectionate and casual, "I

thought I ought to speak to you on her account as much as your own, darling. Girls of that age are inclined to be romantic. The little thing might begin to think she was really fond of you. . . .”

“She’s not a ‘little thing,’ mother. She’s—”

“—and that would be too bad—for both of you. It’s always unfortunate for a boy in your position—not yet out of college—to let himself get too deeply involved—”

“I’m not keen about that ‘involved,’ mother. You sound as though you thought Lora had deliberately set out to—”

“And *I’m* not keen about your tone of voice, son,” his father said. “You’re talking to your mother.”

“Sorry. But you don’t understand—either of you. I can’t let you speak of Lora like that—I’m not a child. I’m of age—”

“No man’s of age,” Bailey said angrily, “until he’s independent. And until he is independent—able to support himself *and* a wife, if necessary, he has no right to get himself *involved* in a love affair!”

Judd clenched his hands, his face went quite white and Marie Harcott said, “Please, Bailey! Let’s not have a scene. We know it’s not as serious as all that, Judd. We know you wouldn’t be foolish enough to handicap your future—good gracious! It will be years before you’ll be in a position to pay serious

attentions to *any* girl. You realize that as well as we do. But we do think it's unwise of you to rush one girl the way you've been rushing Lora Paris. Not that she isn't a nice little girl, considering the kind of people she—"

"She's the finest girl I ever—"

His father burst out, "She may be a fine girl, but you're seeing too much of her for your own good. Your mother and I don't like it—we want it stopped. There's the whole thing in a nutshell." He said it loudly, drawn up to his full height which still left him half a head shorter than his tall son. He had not intended to say anything of the sort. He had intended to be as suave and diplomatic as his wife had desired, but Judd's attitude had confirmed his fears that the young fool really was in a fair way to mess up his career before it was even launched. That was an intolerable thought and, for a moment, he had forgotten that modern parents did not bully their young. Modern parents and children were supposed to be good pals. Mr. Harcott thought of this in time and added heartily, "Understand, we don't want to spoil your fun. We don't expect you to be a monk—have all the girls you like—the more the merrier. I mean, have your fun but don't try to get it all in one place."

Judd winced from this indulgent speech, his nostrils quivered with distaste. He had just come from

the moonlit beach where he and Lora had sat, their hands locked, their voices hushed by the beauty of the night, the miracle of their love. They had discussed their future long and gravely, and Judd had come home resolved to confide their secret to his parents as Lora was to confide in hers.

He had known that his father and mother would be surprised, that they might try to talk him out of engaging himself to Lora while he was still in college. He had been prepared for this, for opposition, a scene, tears. But he had not been prepared for this airy dismissal of the thing that was more sacred, more vital to him than anything that had ever happened to him before. Without a word he turned and walked into the house.

Chapter 3

LORA WALKED FROM FORKS HARBOR WHERE THE summer cottages and the boat club were, to Forks Village which set a mile back from the rocky coast. It was a late August morning and the tall old elms along the way and the green lawns and flower beds behind their white picket fences, looked a little dry and dusty. Lora loved the old village. The low-roofed white houses with their small windows and prim doorways, always made her think of patient, clean old women waiting for the minister to call. She loved the ancient green where sheep had once grazed and joyous soldiers had once foregathered. But she did not notice these things this morning. She walked briskly, slender brown arms swinging, the narrow yellow ribbon around her head matching her sleeveless linen dress. Once or twice someone hailed her and she waved back but did not stop. Some village men lounging in front of the drugstore stared at her, one or two of them who knew her, said, "Morning, Miss Paris," with that mixture of curiosity, contempt and wistfulness which is the characteristic attitude of the "native" toward the "summer

people.” Propped against the curb in front of the Candy and Soda Emporium, she saw her brother’s bicycle. She frowned at that and quickened her pace, but she was not quite quick enough. As she came abreast of the entrance, Hay came out, slamming the screen door behind him.

He said, “Hey! Hi, Sis! Where ‘y’ goin’?”

Hay was going to be a very presentable young man one of these days but at the moment he resembled nothing so much as one of those large jointed wooden dolls so popular with little boys and girls. In his extremely short khaki shorts and sleeveless jersey, the lumpy similarity was startling. He was all knees, elbows and ankles, strung together on lanky, brittle looking bones. His ears stood straight out, his blond hair grew every which way, his very fair skin was in the process of peeling for the third time since June, his mouth was stuffed with candy.

Lora said casually, “Hello, darling. I thought you were going sailing.”

“I am. Cliff’s waiting for the tide. Where ‘y’ goin’?”

“Oh, just for a walk.”

Hay mounted his bicycle and began propelling himself along beside her, one foot on the curb, the other on the pedal. “I bet I know where you’re goin’. What do you bet I know?”

“Hay, you’re drooling all over your shirt!”

Hay swallowed and drew the back of his hand across his lips and gave her a wide, sticky grin. "I bet you're goin' to meet Judd."

"The tide's full at ten," Lora said. "It must be almost ten now."

"I bet you are," Hay said, both feet on the pedals now and wobbling dangerously. "When I asked Cliff if Judd was comin' out in the *Reckless* with us, he said no, Judd had a date."

"Well, maybe he has."

"An' I know who with!"

"Listen, Hay!" She went to the the curb and took hold of a handlebar and he stopped. "Don't say that again, dear. Please don't."

Hay was disturbed by his sister's softly urgent voice but naturally he couldn't afford to let her see that. "Aw, I was only kiddin'," he grumbled. "What's eatin' you lately, anyway—all this Lady Macbeth stuff!"

"Hay, you won't say that to anyone else—that I'm going to meet Judd, will you? I'm not asking you to tell a lie—I wouldn't do that, dear, but you don't *have* to say anything about seeing me up here, do you?"

Though the situation between Judd and Lora had never been discussed before him, Hay knew as much about it as anyone. After all, he was not a stupid boy. He said now, scornfully, "Oh, *I'm* not goin' to

say anything. It's none o' *my* business if you want to go sneakin' off to meet a man! *I* know *I* wouldn't do it. If *I* wanted to see anybody I'd see 'em right out where everybody could see, see!" He wheeled his bike around and made off down the Harbor road, his body bent low over the handlebars in approved racing fashion.

Judd was waiting behind the old white church, his roadster parked in the shade of a maple tree. Opposite the church was the quiet graveyard where the village had buried its dead for two hundred years. The church and the parsonage and the graveyard took up the whole of the short street—"And the parson's busy and the dead won't tell," Judd had said when he selected the place for a rendezvous.

When he saw Lora turn into the street, he sprang out and went to meet her. They walked back to the car, arms interlocked, having spoken not one word. But when they were seated in the car, his eyes went hungrily over her. "Gosh, I'm glad to see you!"

"I'm kind of glad to see you, too."

Then he stepped on the starter and they drove off.

"That's the fifth time," said Miss Ermina Hedd, letting the curtain fall back across the sitting room window of the Parsonage. "If you'd come in here a minute sooner, you'd of seen them yourself."

“Seen what— Oh, our young lovers, you mean?”

“Five days hand running,” Miss Hedd said to her brother and took off her glasses through which she had watched the meeting between the slim fair-haired girl and the tall brown-haired boy. “First *he* comes in that car and then *she* comes—they were holding hands brazen as you like.”

The Reverend Frederick Hedd, who was quite old and slightly bent but had the youthful face of all truly good old men, smiled mischievously at his sister. “Well, how could they know you were spying on them?”

Miss Hedd was annoyed. “I don’t see anything to joke about. You can be sure their parents don’t know they’re meeting like this or why should they do it?”

“I don’t know I’m sure, my dear Mina. Have you seen my spectacles? I’ve lost them again.”

Mina said waspishly, “Well, if I was a minister of the gospel and saw a thing like that going on right under my nose, I’d do something about it.”

Her brother peered under a lamp base, shook out a sofa cushion in his search for the missing spectacles. “I’m afraid you would, Mina. I’m very much afraid you would, my dear,” he said.

Two miles from Forks Village, Judd left the road and drove through a small grove of pines to a rocky

ledge high above the sea. From that height the breakers crashing on the rocks below, looked gentle and harmless. Distant boats with their sails full of wind appeared to be standing still on the water. Both Judd and Lora gazed out over the sea for a moment, then at the same instant they turned and smiled at each other. Judd slid his arm behind her head and drew her face up to his.

Afterwards, for a long time Lora lay quietly in his arms, her head in the hollow of his shoulder, his chin resting on her hair. At last she stirred and said, "Judd, I hate this—having to meet in this sneaky way. It spoils things a little."

"I hate it, too. But we wouldn't be doing it if there was any other way, naturally."

Neither of them saw anything odd in that remark. What they were doing was quite natural and necessary. Their love had been forced into clandestine channels. This was sad but they must make the best of it. They had so little time, now. Summer was gathering in the lovely days so swiftly.

Lora said now, "Only six more days, darling."

"Don't remind me!" His arms tightened around her. "Lora, Lora, how am I ever going to live without you all those months!"

"Don't try. Take me back to Haverton with you. You can hide me under the bed and smuggle me up food in your pockets."

“Or *you* might take me with you,” he said.

“Expose you to all those girls!” she cried. “Never! It’s going to be bad enough when you come up for the prom—you *will* come, Judd?”

“Try and stop me!”

“I won’t—but somebody else will,” she said.

He said grimly, “*Let them!*”

She laughed a little and clung to him. “I love you so, darling! Judd, you’re sure you won’t forget me?”

“Lora! How can you?”

“Oh, I know you won’t mean to, but you’ll be so far away. You’ll be meeting new people—new girls. So many things can happen—that’s what our parents are counting on. They don’t think our love will last—they think it’s just silly boy and girl stuff—that we’ll forget all about each other. And that’s what they want, Judd.”

“I know. And that’s where the joke’s going to be on them, isn’t it?” He held her away and searched her eyes. “Could you forget me, Lora? Don’t you *know* you’re mine—forever and ever?”

She closed her eyes and he drew her back to him. She said, against his cheek, “Yes. I’m yours. I know that—and that’s what makes it seem so silly—for me to be afraid.”

“Afraid, Lora darling?”

“To let you go. This has been so wonderful—

Judd, do you think life will ever be so wonderful for us again?"

"More wonderful when we can really belong to each other, dear."

She was quiet for a little, then, "It seems such a long time. It wouldn't, I suppose, if they'd believe in us—if we could really be engaged."

"Or married!" he said so loudly and suddenly that she looked at him with frightened eyes. He took her face between his hands. "If you were my wife, nothing could happen to separate us. Do you realize that, Lora? Darling, will you marry me now—will you marry me today?"

"Judd! You—you don't mean that!"

"Why shouldn't I mean it? If it hadn't been right for us to belong to each other, why did this happen to us? And why should we wait? We're no younger than plenty of couples who've made a success of marriage. We're sure of our love, aren't we?"

"We—yes, we're sure of that."

"And what's a college degree? Plenty of fellows get along without 'em. If I go back to college—well, you said yourself that's what our parents are counting on. They think this'll wear off—that we'll forget. And they'll do everything in their power to *make* us forget, be sure of that! And how do we know they won't succeed!"

She cried, "Judd!"

He said passionately, "Lora, let's not risk it, darling! Let's take a chance. I can get a job—some kind of a job—enough to keep us. And we'll be together. Lora, will you do it? Will you, my darling?"

She went from white to scarlet, her breath came quick and light through her open lips. She said in a whisper, "Yes—"

"Darling!"

"But not—not that way. I couldn't let you lose your degree—take a job. I couldn't do that to you, Judd. But if—if you'll promise to go back to college—if you'll let me go back home right after the—wedding, I—I'll marry you today."

"Go back—leave you—"

"Don't you see, that would make everything all right. Everything would be different then—if we were married—we'd know nothing could separate us then—till death did us part—you remember how it goes, Judd?"

"I remember. Lora—"

"I'd wear the ring around my neck and every night I'd put it on my finger—"

"Your wedding ring," he said.

"Nothing could take that away from us—we'd both be safe. And then in June—they'd believe *then* that it was real—they'd have to believe us, then, and we could tell them—"

"Yes," he said. "In June we could tell them—"

She pressed her face against his and he kissed her eyes which were wet. Awed, reverent kisses.

There are moments of exaltation so dazzling that the effect is like looking into the sun. It was like this with Judd and Lora. They could see nothing but the splendor of this plan of theirs. It was such a beautiful plan, so sane and reasonable. They must still be separated but it would be a separation hallowed by the knowledge that they were man and wife. Surely, they would be harming no one by the simple joining of their lives and loves. "To feel that I am yours—to know that you are mine!" was the burden of their rhapsodic song.

"My wife, my own beloved little wife!"

"Yes." And, after a little, Lora said, "Darling, could we go to that dear old church in the village—our trysting place, you know? It's so sweet and peaceful and no one in the village knows us. If we tell the minister just how things are, he'll keep our secret, I know."

Judd liked that idea, too, remembering the slender white spire and the rambling old parsonage half buried under its leafy lilac bushes and rambling roses. "But I think we'd better not get our license in the village, dear. We can drive over to Salem Rocks. Can you get away right after lunch? We can buy the ring there, too—"

Lora was never to forget that lunch with her parents the day she promised to marry Judd. There were just the three of them. Hay was still out on the *Reckless*—"Catching us a mess of fish for dinner, so he says!" George Paris said and laughed.

Hay's mother said loyally, "Well, whatever he catches, we'll *have* to eat, so you may as well be prepared."

They lunched on the screened porch overlooking the garden, an old-fashioned patchwork quilt of delphinium and phlox and foxgloves and coreopsis. The smell of the flowers and the sea was sweet and heavy in the lazy midday heat. George's Adam's apple rode free of his open shirt collar and Julia looked cool and young in her flowered linen dress. They were in a merry mood. George teased Lora about her freckles, "Darned if she hasn't got a new one—right on the tip of her nose, too!"

Her mother said that was because Lora had inherited her fair skin. "Never you mind, darling, it's better to have a few freckles than a face like an old suitcase like someone I might mention," she said, and winked at her daughter.

Lora didn't have the heart to wink back. They were so sweet. They were old and hard and love to them was a forgotten word. But they were hers and it was terrible to think that she must hurt them.

She thought of it like that. It was one of the things she remembered long afterwards—that fatalistic sense that she *must* do what she was doing, that she and Judd *must* make their love secure against the hostile forces they were sure would be launched against it. Though she had never loved her parents more tenderly, not once did she waver, not once did it occur to her to turn back.

The Garden Club was holding its annual exhibition at the boat club that afternoon and when they left the table, Julia said, “Don’t forget, you promised to serve on the refreshment committee, darling.”

Lora had forgotten, but she smiled and said, “Oh, yes!” She was astonished that she could be so cool and wondered if perhaps she wasn’t the wickedest daughter in the world. “What time do you think I should be there? I—I have to go up to the village first.”

“Oh, if you come along about four-thirty or five—”

Four-thirty or five. By that time, she would be wearing her wedding ring next to her heart—“I’ll be there,” she said and went up to her room to change.

It was a small, low ceiled room. The woodwork was white and there were ruffled curtains at the windows and hooked rugs on the floor. The small spool bed and chest and table were of soft old maple.

Lora had slept in that room every summer of her life. As she had grown older, it had grown smaller and the sea, which she could see from the window beside her bed, had come closer.

She went and stood at that window now thinking that when she stood there again, she would be Judd's bride—spiritually and legally she would be a wife. And that was all they needed or wanted right now, that would be enough.

She took off the little yellow dress, the ribbon off her hair. White for the bride. She chose a plain white crepe dress, fresh and spotless. For something new she would carry the little white silk bag her father had bought her on one of his trips to New York. She was in and out of the tub in five minutes. She brushed and brushed her hair until it shone. Then she tied it back with a narrow blue ribbon—"something blue," she thought.

When she was ready, she looked at herself in the mirror. Clean and slim and fragrant; white and gold. Did she look like a bride? She thought Judd would think she did.

It was a little after five when Judd and Lora went, arm in arm, up the flagged walk of the Parsonage and pulled the old fashioned doorbell. Miss Ermina Hedd answered it and her mouth dropped open when she saw those two standing on the mat.

“Good afternoon,” Judd said. “Is the minister at home? I’m sorry to say I don’t know his name.”

Miss Hedd’s sharp eyes went from the man to the girl. The gates of Heaven had opened just wide enough to shed a little of its immortal glory on those two young faces. But joy that is worn like a light was an offensive thing in Ermina’s eyes—especially when it is illicit joy, which her previous knowledge of them convinced her that it was. Her first impulse, as she afterwards confessed, was to say the minister was *not* at home and send them away “with a piece of my mind!” Though this would have been a heinous lie and she revered the truth, she would have done so if she had not feared her brother’s wrath. But she knew he had heard the bell, he would have to be told who had rung it and she could not lie to *him*.

“Yes,” she said, “he’s in. But he’s very busy writing his sermon. Is your business important?”

The color flooded Lora’s cheeks and she moved a little closer to her lover, but Judd said clearly and firmly, “We want to ask him to marry us, if he will.”

“Well!” Ermina said. “Well!” But there was nothing for it but to let them in. She stood aside, her head high, her thin nostrils quivering. “Come in—step into the parlor, please. I’ll speak to him.” She hurried down the hall to her brother’s study.

Frederick heard his sister out without moving, without speaking. His eyes still on the papers before him, his pencil still poised, he listened to his sister's indignant, shrill voiced story.

"I knew all along they were up to something like this. They're eloping. I'm as sure of it as I am of my own name and if you marry them, you'll be committing a terrible sin."

"That," he said, "is for me to decide, my dear." He took off his spectacles and laid down his pencil. "If they are of age and their license is in order, they'd have no trouble getting someone else to marry them even if I refused."

"Well, at least the sin wouldn't be on *your* head! Why don't you notify their parents? They're from down at the Harbor—summer people—you can tell *that* with half an eye. You could telephone the girl's parents."

He sighed again. "Parents are often no wiser than their children, Mina." He stood up, pocketed his spectacles. "You must leave this to me. Ask them to come over to the vestry, please. I'd rather talk with them there—"

Ermina Hedd was a virtuous woman, a devoted sister, a matchless housekeeper; charitable to the poor, merciful to the sick. But she possessed none of those softer qualities to which we can, no doubt, trace the old adage that all the world loves a lover.

If driven to it, she would have been hard pressed to say which she despised more—lovers or the “summer people.” That Judd and Lora should thus fall under the stigma of her two most ardent antipathies, was unfortunate. But it was not entirely responsible for her determination to frustrate their design if she could. By the time she had retraced her steps to the parlor, she had convinced herself that the salvation of this erring pair lay in her own, two capable hands and her thin cheekbones burned with religious fever.

The two young people, seated very close together on the haircloth sofa, stood up as she entered and looked at her eagerly. “I forgot to ask your names,” Ermina said.

“He wouldn’t know me—my name is Harcott—”

“And the young lady’s?”

“Miss Paris—”

“Well, Mr. Hedd says he’ll see you in the vestry—you can go out the side door—right this way—across the lawn—”

And they were no sooner out of the door than she had the telephone receiver off its hook. She said to the operator, “Mattie, I’m in an awful hurry. Do you know the number of a family down at the Harbor named Paris?”

“Sure. It’s three nine ring two four. Shall I ring ’em?”

“Please, Mattie—and ring ’em hard, will you?”

So Mattie rang the Paris’s telephone hard and Hay, just off the *Reckless* and looking for someone to admire his catch of four beautiful if slightly under-sized mackerel, answered it. He informed the urgent voice at the other end of the wire that neither Mr. nor Mrs. Paris was at home, that he wasn’t sure when they would be. That, yes, if it was important he might be able to find them, they were probably at the Garden Club Exhibit. Yes, he could deliver the message—

Years afterward, the memory of those few moments was still fresher in Hay’s mind than any other. The feel of the drowsy summer afternoon, the smell of the sea and of his own fishy hands, the sounds that drifted in through the screened windows—children’s laughter, the put-put of the fishermen’s boats, a radio playing that summer’s sentimental hit—“The Boulevard of Broken Dreams.”

Hay was not yet fifteen, half boy, half man. For a moment after he had hung up the receiver, he felt terribly helpless and confused, frightened, too, by the portentous message he had agreed to deliver. He drew his bony forearm across his forehead and said, “Gee! Golly!” Then he started across the room on a run. But at the door he stopped. He had, as all boys have, his own code of ethics. It suddenly occurred to him that what he was about to do was some-

thing he had never done before. Never had he been a tattler, never had he betrayed a friend. And Lora was more than friend—more to him than anyone else save his father and mother. He remembered her face that morning, how sweet she had looked, how sad. “I wouldn’t ask you to tell a lie, Hay—” And he admired Judd, too. He admired Judd more than any young man he knew. And now he was going to let ’em down. Well, he wouldn’t do it. He’d be darned if he would. It wasn’t his affair. If people wanted to get married—and she couldn’t marry a nicer guy than Judd—and Judd would be his brother-in-law—

“Hello, darling, when did you get back?” His mother came, cool and smiling up the porch steps. “Did you catch anything—why, Hay! What is it, darling! What’s the *matter?*”

If he had had a little more time—but here was comfort, here was the calm and loving strength that makes a boy weak sometimes and after all, Hay was only a boy. He broke into a boy’s rasping sobs—and out came the story.

Chapter 4

GEORGE PARIS SWUNG HIS CAR INTO THE SHADY street where the white spire showed above the elms and Julia said, "This must be the place," and George nodded and jammed on the brake.

Mrs. Harcott leaned forward from the back seat and screamed above the screech of the brake, "Is this the place?"

Julia screamed back, "I think so—that's Judd's roadster there, isn't it?" and opened the door. She and the Harcotts were out of the car before it had come to a full stop. George followed, slamming the door behind him.

George had said they would make it in five minutes and he had been right. Where they had lost time was back at the Harbor. First Julia had had to rush over to the Clubhouse to find her husband and when George had heard Hay's story, he had insisted upon hunting up the Harcotts. Fortunately they were still at the club—Mrs. Harcott presiding over a flower booth, her husband in the game room. George had got them outside, away from the crowds before he had told them. Then he had hustled them all into his car.

Every detail of that brief drive to the village, with the hot afternoon sun in their faces, was indelibly stamped on Julia's mind, the way Mr. Harcott's plump face had seemed to crumple; the way his wife's had gradually waked from its expression of dazed disbelief to one of deadly fury and resentment. "To elope—like a common—I can't *believe* Judd would do such a horrible thing. He never *would* have done it of his own volition!"

Her burning eyes were fixed on Julia, an obvious impeachment of her son's seducer and the seducer's parents. Julia thought, "Of course she would blame Lora! The girl's always to blame!" and she looked at George. But he sat tight-lipped at the wheel. If he had heard he had the good sense to give no sign and Julia followed his example. "Lora! Lora! Lora!" she thought.

No, it was not a pleasant ride—

But they were no sooner out of the car than Ermina Hedd came running down the flagstoned path to meet them. She had been watching at the window. She said breathlessly, "It's all right. They're not married yet. I told my brother I'd sent you word and he said for you to come over to the vestry—this way—"

The small vestry was close with the smell of dust and ancient hymnbooks and moldy Axminster. As his callers entered it from the garden, Mr. Hedd

came through the inner doorway leading into the body of the church and closed the door behind him. He said, "Good afternoon!" to the quartet filing in, blinking their sun-blinded eyes, peering this way and that. His glance rested briefly on each one of the four—the plump pink man in white flannels, the lean man in knickers, the two women in their simple, light summer frocks but with that unmistakable city air and manner characteristic of all the summer people at Forks Harbor.

Ermina started. "These are the parents—"

But Mr. Harcott interrupted. "My name is Harcott—"

"Judd's father," the old minister said with a little bow.

"I'm his mother."

He bowed again and looked beyond her. "Then you must be Mr. and Mrs. Paris?"

"Yes." Julia pushed past Mr. Harcott. "Your sister telephoned—this is a terrible shock to us all. Where are they?"

"They're inside—in the church—" The four of them surged forward but the minister stepped back against the inner door, his hand uplifted, palm toward them. "Wait, please. They're quite comfortable and safe in there and if you don't mind, I should like to have a few words with you before you see them. Won't you sit down?"

Bailey Harcott said crisply, "Thank you, but we're hardly in the mood—"

"Please sit down. You needn't wait, Mina."

He was a simple, country parson in shabby, ill-fitting clothes. His voice was singularly sweet and mild. But Ermina turned promptly and went out and Julia and Mrs. Harcott dropped automatically into two slatted Sunday School chairs. George did not move from his place near the door but Mr. Harcott glared at Frederick and no doubt would have spoken if the old minister had not spoken first. "Your children and I have had a nice, long talk—as fine a boy and girl as I've met in a long time, by the way—and they've told me frankly just how matters stand," he said. "They've told me you disapprove of their attachment for each other but I must confess they were a little vague about the reasons." He took off his spectacles and smiled round on them benevolently. "Since my sister felt it her duty to notify you of their impending marriage, I thought it as well to postpone the ceremony, give you an opportunity to state your objections—"

They could not believe their ears. State their objections! "Do you mean," Bailey Harcott said hoarsely, "that you actually would have married them—after they'd confessed they were doing this without their parents' knowledge and consent?"

"A parent's consent," Frederick said tranquilly,

“is unnecessary in cases where the young people are of age. However, if you can show just cause why—”

“Just cause!” Marie Harcott repeated, shaking. “Isn’t it cause enough that they’ve come to you like this—to ask you to marry them secretly—”

“Not always,” the minister said. “When a young couple comes to me in these circumstances—specially as high-principled a young couple as Judd and Lora—I look about for the reason. Experience has taught me that there would be no secret marriages if there were a better understanding between parents and children. You see, in my opinion, there are no bad children—only bad parents.”

“That is not the case here! Judd’s father and I have always been in perfect accord with him—”

“You mean you had no objection to Judd’s courting Lora?”

Bailey Harcott answered for his wife. “Courting her! I tell you the boy’s still in college. He can’t support himself to say nothing of a wife.”

“He doesn’t intend to support her,” Frederick said, “until he is through college. They have no idea of consummating their marriage before that time. They merely wish to go through the ceremony—”

“Ridiculous!” Mrs. Harcott cried and Frederick looked at her.

“It doesn’t seem ridiculous to them,” he said, “nor

to me, my friend. It does seem sad, very sad that they should feel themselves compelled to take such a course—”

George Paris spoke up suddenly. “You’ve hit the nail on the head there, Doctor! I mean when you say they felt compelled to do this, well, I can see how they would. They’re romantic and sensitive—at least, our Lora is—and they’ve magnified our objections until they’ve got, well, what you might call delusions of persecution. Where we made our mistake was in not taking them more seriously, but we didn’t. We didn’t take them seriously at all.”

“That’s the modern way, isn’t it?” Mr. Hedd said. “It’s unfashionable to take things seriously these days, isn’t it? Especially anything as quaint and antiquated as love.”

“This is absurd!” Marie Harcott said impatiently. “For us to sit here dramatizing a boy and girl infatuation, which is all this is. They’ll live to thank us for interfering—at least, Judd will. He’s not in a normal frame of mind, he couldn’t be. He never did an underhanded thing in his life before—until he met this girl—”

“The same is true of Lora,” Julia cried, “until she met *this boy*! And please remember, Judd is nearly four years older—”

“If he were *ten* years older, he would still have been putty in her hands. She has monopolized him from the first day he arrived—”

“*She*—that’s not true! Judd has been at our house morning, noon and night—”

“Yes, and you let him come. You knew quite well what it would lead to. You hoped—”

“I hoped for nothing. I never gave it a second thought. I liked Judd and trusted him—”

“Because you knew it was to your advantage to *trust* him! Because you knew perfectly well she’d probably never have another chance to make such a match—”

The two husbands had been making those inarticulate sounds and vague gestures peculiar to embarrassed males. The old minister stood quietly, fingering his spectacles, his narrowed eyes swinging between the two enraged woman. Now Bailey Harcott laid a hand on his wife’s shoulder, “Marie!”

She turned her blazing eyes on him. “You know it’s true. You’ve said yourself they’d never have been accepted in any other community like this! They wouldn’t have been accepted here if they hadn’t bought their way in—”

Julia Paris sprang from her chair and across the room, planted herself before the minister. “Let me by, please! I must see my daughter!”

He stepped back until he was flat against the door and shook his white head slowly. “So this is what drove those two poor children to me.”

“Let me by, please! You can’t keep a mother from her child!”

"I beg your pardon, I can. While that boy and girl are in my church they are in God's care—and mine." His old voice rang like an organ tone in the small room. "Why should I give them up to you? What effort have either of you ever made to understand what was in their young hearts! None. I see that now! Love came to them, but because it did not come at the time or in the way you approved, you belittled and ridiculed it. You repelled them with your sophistries, threw them back on each other for the comfort and understanding they should have found in their parents!"

Marie Harcott said hotly, "They would never have been happy—"

"Rubbish!" the old voice boomed and they shrank back. A terrible old man in his wrath was the country parson. "How do you know they wouldn't—how could anyone know? But you weren't thinking of their happiness—you were thinking of yourselves, your own personal animosities—your social appearances. Now, when the damage is done, when it's too late, you come crying and pleading—"

"Too late!" Julia said, sharp and breathless. "You—you mean you would marry them against our wishes!"

"Why not? They came to me with the purest of motives, their license is in order, they are of age, they love each other. As to your objections—you

have failed them. You have failed them in their first great emotional crisis and parents who fail their children can't expect to be honored by them. I am not sure that I would not be failing them too if I were to part them now, when they have come so far—to the very foot of the altar."

It seemed preposterous to them afterwards, that they should have allowed themselves to be reduced to speechless confusion by a simple country parson. Marie Harcott was the first to throw off his spell. She was a proud woman and, at the moment, a furious one. But she was also clever. It was plain the old man was a fanatic. And so she said, very gently and gravely, "Why not let us discuss this with Judd and Lora? Why not let them decide—"

"They have already made their decision. I doubt if any one of us can alter it."

"We can try."

He appeared to consider this, his faded blue eyes fixed thoughtfully on his folded hands. Then he said, "It might be that we could persuade them to agree to an engagement—" the stir that created stopped him, but only momentarily, "If they would and if you would sanction an engagement between them, we might persuade them to wait—"

The four exchanged quick, dazed glances and old Frederick talked on, his voice rising and falling in solemn pulpit cadences. But he was scarcely aware

of what he said now. He was watching them anxiously, wondering if they would see through this strategic move of his. He was a little alarmed at his own temerity but not at all conscience-stricken. The future of those two waiting in the quiet church, lay in his hands. "The right to pledge their love openly—that is all they ever wanted—"

Bailey Harcott interrupted. "In the circumstances, it might be the wisest thing to do. If Mr. and Mrs. Paris—"

"The only thing we *can* do, as far as I can see," George Paris said grimly.

Marie Harcott cried, with a half hysterical laugh, "Why, of course! It's the very thing. They'll certainly agree to that—and it will give us time—"

The radiance that had flooded the minister's face died away. He saw now that he had been mistaken. The future of that boy and girl did not rest with him, after all. Once outside his church, once back in their own world, they would be subject to its doctrines and those were not the doctrines of a simple country parson. He had done what he could but now he recognized, with a sad, devastating certainty, that it had not been enough. His shoulders sagged as he turned and led the way into the church.

Chapter 5

THE REVEREND FREDERICK HEDD'S CHURCH WAS a small, unpretentious place. Its pews were painted white, its altar of uncarven oak, its plain glass windows were fringed with the ivy that blanketed its outer walls. A humble little church but it had the serenity and dignity common to every House of God which, unlike other houses, sees human nature only at its Sunday best or subdued by those solemn crises which punctuate man's prosaic biography.

Lora and Judd sat in one of the front pews, their hands and arms interlocked. Mr. Hedd had forewarned them. They had been shocked and frightened for a moment, but that had passed. They were prepared for open battle now. Their faces were white, Judd's eyes narrow and rebellious, Lora's wide and eager. In her heart she was glad their secret had been forced into the open. Now they could proclaim their love, fight for it honestly.

But they were not to be permitted to fight, there was to be no battle. Mrs. Harcott's first remark made that apparent. She said, hurrying to them, at once indulgent and gently reproachful, "You two

silly children! What *do* you mean by running out on us this way!" And the others were quick to pick up the cue: "You should have had more faith in us!"—"My darling, if you had come to me frankly—" "Lora, you should have known—"

It was not a long interview. Neither Frederick nor the elopers were permitted a voice in it until the parents had had their say. As their purpose dawned on Judd and Lora, their abortive attempts to speak ceased altogether. They could only look at each other with dazed, incredulous eyes. But there is something oddly unsettling in the discovery that one's supposed enemies are in reality harmless, well-meaning folk; in finding that the bridges so valiantly burned behind one, have been magically rebuilt for a victorious retreat.

"—an engagement," Mrs. Harcott was saying. "Then if you feel the same toward each other after Judd has graduated—"

They had gone as far as that when the church rang suddenly with Lora's sharp outcry, "No! We don't want that, Judd—not now! This—it's the same as an engagement. You tell them, Mr. Hedd!" She pulled frantically at Judd's sleeve. "Judd, tell them it's all settled. We can't change things *now*!"

But Mr. Hedd *had* told them and Judd merely flung an arm around her, held her close, "Darling, don't you see, it's all right, now? Everything's all

right now, don't you see?" For he had been terribly moved by his parents' drawn faces, their forgiving attitude. Lora's outburst in the face of such magnanimity appeared as childish, and unreasonable to him as to their elders.

And of course it was childish. Even Lora herself could see that, and utterly unreasonable. Now that there was no longer any excuse for secrecy, now that they had gained their end. And this sort of thing always looked so badly for of course it never could really be kept secret. It was Julia who touched on this aspect of the affair, "—and the world always imputes the worst motive to a runaway marriage, Lora—and of course it reflects on the parents. *They* are the ones who are blamed," and she managed to catch Mr. Hedd's eyes as she said it. "I don't think you and Judd have thought of that, have you?"

And so, very simply and politely, with no raised voices save for that one hysterical outburst from Lora, and with the full consent of their parents, the elopers found themselves a betrothed couple instead of man and wife.

It was the minister who used the quaint and flowery word, congratulating them on their "betrothal." He went and stood between them with his arms around their shoulders. He said, his old voice booming genially, "I congratulate you, even though I do lose by it—I presume you intended to pay me for the

job, young man?" And, when Judd looked at him uncertainly, he laughed and hugged the tall boy's shoulders. "Just my little joke! And now, I suppose, you'll have one of those elegant weddings in one of those stylish New York churches with a proper bishop in vestments and all the grand trimmings— Well, I'll try not to be jealous—but you'll come to see me one day, won't you?"

All this time he was leading them down the aisle, the others following, and presently they were all outside in the sunshine again. For a moment the bright glare after the shady church, blinded Lora. She stood blinking, her head lowered. When she heard someone shout her name and Judd's, heard Judd shout back, she looked up and her mother said, "That was Cliff Sidney and little Hannah Vines—who was the man in the rumble seat, I wonder?"

Judd said, "Looked like Earle Gracie," and they all stared earnestly after the disappearing car as though nothing extraordinary had happened.

It came about naturally enough that Lora should drive home in her father's car while Mr. and Mrs. Harcott went in Judd's roadster. Lora found herself seated between her parents on the front seat. She wasn't sure whether she had said good-by to Judd, wasn't very sure of anything save the pressure of her mother's and father's bodies on either side of her. The whole back seat was empty and here she was

crowded in the front with her parents, like a little girl. And suddenly she felt like a little girl, very small and immensely guilty. She wouldn't, she thought, have felt quite so guilty if they had reproached her.

"That old minister," Julia said across Lora to her husband, "is really a sweet thing. He talks like an old-fashioned book."

"Maybe that's why I liked him," George said. "I always did like old-fashioned books—"

Lora went straight up to her room when they reached home. Her mother and father appeared not to notice; they were talking about Hay's mackerel. "I'm afraid they're too small to cook, after all."

Lora hurried upstairs, closed her door and leaned against it, her eyes closed, her upper lip caught hard between her teeth. Then she opened her eyes and saw herself in the mirror opposite the door. Her white dress was still fresh and the blue ribbon still circled her bright head. The new white bag still hung from her fingers. She thought, going across to her bureau, "I forgot something borrowed," with a little stab of alarm. And then she realized that it didn't matter.

She stood at the window and looked at the sea. Familiar, late-afternoon sounds drifted up to her—cars going home from the club, tennis players strolling past holding heated post-mortems over the last

set, the hiss of a spraying hose on the lawn next door. Sounds light-hearted enough but they fell with strange discordance on Lora's ears. She remembered thinking, before she had gone to meet Judd, that when she came back to all this again she would be a bride. Now she thought, with a quizzical twist of lips, that she had come back a widow who had never been a wife. She sat down suddenly on her bed, her hand fisted hard against her mouth, but a knock on the door brought her to her feet.

"Come in!"

Hay came in slowly. He was clean, he had just washed up for dinner and his freckles stood out triumphantly against his scrubbed, sunburned skin. He had soaked and brushed his hair with such good effect that only a couple of unruly spikes had broken loose from the sodden mass—and his day's catch dangled from a string in his outstretched hand.

He said, "H'lo—look!"

Lora sat down on the bed again. "Hello—oh, grand. What are they?"

"Mackerel. Four—see?"

Lora looked at the mackerel. They had been out of the water for some time now, a fact rather strongly apparent in the small room. "Lovely!"

"They're not very big—but they're legal. I mean, you throw 'em back when they're really *little*." He eyed them anxiously then he said, "Mom thinks

they're too small to cook but, if you like, I'll cook a couple of 'em for you."

Lora managed to smile her gratitude. "No, thanks, darling. I— I'm not very hungry."

"You couldn't eat just one?"

She shook her head. "I'm afraid not, dear."

He started for the door, suddenly he turned back. His face was fiery red, his voice harsh and angry. He burst out, "Listen—it's all my fault. I—I couldn't keep my mouth shut—I had to go and spill it! I didn't mean to—I dunno *what* made me do it—"

"Oh!" Lora cried. "Oh! So—it was you!"

"Yeah, it was me!" he snarled. "I couldn't keep my darn mouth shut!"

"But that's all right, darling!" Lora said and smiled on him brightly. "You mustn't feel badly. It's really fine that you did tell because everything's all right now. I mean, they believe us now so everything's fine! We're engaged—"

"Y'are!" In his relief he almost shrieked it. "You'n Judd! Say! That's swell!"

"Isn't it?"

"You're going to marry him anyway! Say, that's swell! He'll be my brother-in-law, then. Say! Judd's a prince, all right. An' listen, you know he bought half an interest in Cliff's *Reckless* and maybe he'll take me for a cruise sometime. Do you think maybe he will?"

“Yes, m-maybe he—m-maybe he will.”

“Say—” He stopped, appalled. Lora had gone limp, doubled forward like a dropped marionette. Her body shook and the sound of her sobs was terrible to hear. Hay looked at her fearfully, shifting his feet. He looked at the door. Then he laid his mackerel on a chair and shuffled across to her. “Aw, listen, don’t do that, sis!” He sat down beside her and laid his bony arm across her shoulders and patted her awkwardly. It was a thing he had never done before and he felt pretty foolish doing it now but there was, luckily, no one around to see. “Listen, you better quit. You’ll be sick if you don’t. Listen, whatcha crying for anyway? Everything’s okay now, isn’t it?”

And, after a little, Lora said with her face still sunk in her soaked handkerchief, “Y-yes. Everything’s—okay—now.”

Judd’s sense of guilt spread and deepened until it was all but intolerable. Neither on the drive home nor at dinner had his parents referred to his crime. But his mother looked white and worn, his father’s determined nonchalance was nearly as trying. After dinner Mrs. Harcott went out on the porch and lay down in the swing. Bailey made straight for the living room and his evening paper.

Judd wandered restlessly over the house, picked up a magazine and laid it down, turned the radio on and

off, lit a cigarette and threw it in the empty fireplace. He knew he should be grateful for this silence, this polite pretense that nothing unusual had occurred. Instead he found it terribly oppressive. Not that he wanted a rumpus, but, now that he could think back over that scene in the church, it seemed to him that so much had been left unsaid. Things had happened so swiftly. Everything had been settled—nothing had been settled. He had been given no opportunity to justify himself and there was this great gap between him and his parents. His heart was full to bursting. He would have given much for a small boy's privilege to spill its overcharged burden on his mother's breast. He thrust his hands into his pockets and went out on the porch.

"Throw that little afghan over my feet, will you, dear?"

Judd covered his mother's feet with the afghan. She thanked him faintly and he said, speaking quickly and very casually, "I think I'll run over to see Lora for a few minutes."

She said gently, "Very well, dear." And then, before he could move, "Judd, do you think if we started tomorrow, you could drive me home and get back to college in time?"

He looked down at her, astounded. "Tomorrow! Drive you—"

"We've got to get the car back to Cleveland somehow and it would really be more convenient if the servants went by train. If they leave the day after we do, they'll still get there before we can—in time to open the house. Your father can drive your car as far as Haverton and come on from there by rail."

Judd said, "But why the rush? I thought you weren't leaving until next week and anyway you'd hate a trip like that. You know how these long treks bore you."

"I know, dear. But I think I would enjoy this—with you." Her voice sounded exhausted. "And I want to get away—I feel I must get home. We could take it slowly—I feel it might rest me. I seem to be pretty tired."

He winced at that, felt the heat in his cheeks. But his thoughts flew to Lora. "Wouldn't it look a little funny to the Parises?"

"Funny! In what way, darling?"

"Well—I mean, there'll be things to attend to—announcements to send out. They'll want to announce our engagement, I suppose, have a party probably—"

"I'm sorry, Judd, but I'm afraid I'm not equal to a party just now. I'm afraid we'll have to postpone that. They can announce the engagement without our being here—they probably won't bother to

make an official announcement anyway, until they get back to New York."

Judd walked to the edge of the porch, stood looking out at the pattern of leaves and moonlight on the lawn. He felt confused and angry and disappointed but he had no right to complain. No right to haggle over unimportant details. He should be glad to be let off so easily.

He said as calmly as he could, "I was going to run down to Providence in the morning and get the ring."

"The— Oh, yes. But in that case we couldn't get started until after lunch! It would be lots better to leave early. You could get the ring in Cleveland and send it to Lora, couldn't you? I'm sure she'd understand if you explained—" she broke off and sighed deeply." "I'm really too tired to discuss it any more tonight, Judd."

She was taking it for granted that he would agree—which was natural, of course. He glanced uneasily at her through the thickening dusk. She was lying very still, he thought her eyes were closed. "Well, guess I'd better be stepping," he said and tiptoed down the porch steps.

Marie heard him go and her languor vanished. She threw off the afghan, sprang up and hurried into the living room. "He's gone," she said. "He's gone over there!"

Bailey lowered his paper. "What?"

"Judd. He's gone over to the Parises."

"Well, I suppose that's natural."

His wife's hands fisted at her sides. "I can't bear it!"

"Now, now, you won't have to bear it much longer. How'd he take to the idea of leaving to-morrow?"

"Oh, he's coming—he doesn't want to, of course." She gave a short, harsh laugh. "He wanted to stay—to celebrate the engagement—have a *party!*"

"Well, but if he's agreed to go to the party—sit down, dear—"

"There's the bell! Who can that be? I *can't* see anyone tonight. I can't—"

The maid said from the doorway, "Mrs. Paris would like to see you. She says—"

But before she could say more, Julia was there behind her to speak for herself. "I'm sorry to disturb you like this but something rather important has happened—"

The maid retired and Marie hurriedly crossed the room and closed the door. Bailey Harcott stood up, made a half-gallant half-embarrassed gesture toward a chair. "Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you. I won't keep you a minute." She dropped down on the edge of a straight chair. She wore a white flannel coat over her light dress, her

hands were thrust deep in its pockets, she had evidently been running for she was breathless. "I shouldn't have bothered you but something—has Mrs. Welles called you up?"

Marie was still standing over near the door, her big figure rigid, her mouth tight. "I don't know any Mrs. Welles."

"She's the local correspondent for the New York papers. She called up the house a few minutes ago—about Lora and Judd—wanted to know if there was any truth in the story that they'd eloped. I can't imagine how she heard—unless it was Hannah or Earle—I don't believe Cliff would talk. But Hannah might and Earle—especially Earle—you remember they saw us coming out of the church this afternoon—they probably put two and two together—"

"Well, suppose they did? You told this Mrs.—whatever her name is—that there was no truth in the story, didn't you?"

Something of Julia's distraught air left her at the sound of Marie's clipped cold voice. "Yes, of course," she said. "Of course I told her there was nothing in it. Then I began to think how awful—once these rumors start you know how rapidly they spread. I began to think how terrible it would be for Judd and Lora if the *truth* got out. I mean if it leaked out that they had got a marriage license and that we'd stopped the wedding—"

"It won't," Marie Harcott said. "I don't see how it can—and what if it does? I guess we can survive a little village gossip—"

"I'm not thinking of us, but of them—of Judd and Lora. You know how young people are—how cruel. If their friends find out the truth, they'll make our children's lives miserable."

"They won't find out from me. You needn't worry about that!"

Julia read the sneering implication in that perfectly, but she said, without changing her voice, "I'm not. But I think we ought to prevent their finding it out at all, if we can and I think we can if you're willing to—to pretend a little."

"Pretend?"

"My husband and I decided tonight that Lora should go back to New York with him tomorrow. The sooner they're separated, the sooner they'll forget each other, of course. But I think if we could postpone that a day or two and put on a little act first, we could stop this gossip—kind of, well, save their pride."

"I don't know what you mean by putting on an act," Marie said. "Judd and I are leaving tomorrow. I quite agree that the sooner they're separated—"

"But, don't you see that isn't going to stop the gossip? Everyone knows we opposed their going to—"

gether—Mrs. Welles mentioned that over the phone—and that makes the story just that much more credible. But, if we denied it—not with words but by appearing to be friendly—” She stopped, drew her hands out of her pockets, lifted them in a little shy, beseeching gesture. “We *should* be able to do that—for one evening don’t you think? You see, I thought I might give a little party at the club—announce the engagement. By doing that we would take all the mystery out of the affair. People *couldn’t* say we’d stopped the marriage if we did that.”

“There’s something in that, mother,” Bailey Harcott said. He had kept his eyes on Julia Paris’s face as she talked, an attentive frown between his grizzly brows. “I can see Mrs. Paris’s point. It’ll be pretty hard on Judd if this thing leaks out. His friends’ll kid the life out of him. It might be a darn good idea to throw a little party, publicly announce the engagement—”

“Nonsense!” his wife said. “You’re exaggerating this thing out of all proportion and I’m hardly in the mood to give a party—”

“Neither am I,” Julia said and stood up. Her face was crimson, her eyes blazing. “But I’d be willing to make the effort for the children’s sakes. I’m as eager to have this affair broken off as you are but I don’t want to break their hearts and their lives and that’s what we’re going to do if we don’t go a little more

slowly and carefully. We've got to think of their future—"

"That is what I am doing," Marie Harcott said, breathing hard with her effort to remain calm. "That is why I'm taking Judd away with me in the morning!" She turned her back on Julia and ostentatiously opened the door. "I must ask you to excuse me. I've a great many things to attend to."

Julia's crimson cheeks went white. She crossed the room swiftly. At the door she lifted her blazing eyes to Marie Harcott's face. "Very well. And if my daughter ever lays eyes on your son after tonight, it will not be my fault. You may be quite sure of that!"

She hurried out and Marie closed the door and leaned against it. Her husband said, "I'm inclined to think you were wrong there, mother—"

"Oh, you are! You think I was wrong, do you? Do you know why? Because you're blind! Don't you see why she came here? Can't you realize what she's trying to do with all that noble talk? She was simply trying to cement this business—make it almost impossible for Judd to withdraw! Well, thank heaven *I* saw through her!"

Once he was away from the house, Judd's steps quickened, presently he was running. Even so, his thoughts were ahead of him, already reaching out for Lora. He had never wanted her quite like this,

never needed her so badly, her trusting hand in his, her eyes restoring him to his normal stature. A full east wind was blowing in from the sea and Judd ran with his head lowered so that he did not see Cliff until he was almost upon him.

Cliff shouted, "Hey, what's the rush?"

Judd slowed up long enough to say, "Hi, fella! Be seeing you—" and would have gone on but Cliff grabbed his arm.

"Just a minute, wait a minute! What's all this about you and Lora?"

Judd stopped then, peered at Cliff's lean, dark face, "What do you mean 'all this'?"

"Why, the party at the church? Judd, is it true you two are married?"

Judd let out a loud laugh. "Heavens, no! Where'd you hear that stuff? But I'll tell you a secret—not that it'll be a secret long—we *are* engaged."

Cliff said, "You are! But what—listen, I never heard of a couple having to go to church to get engaged."

"No?" But Judd's heart sank. "Lots of things you've never heard of, mister."

"Yes," Cliff said dryly. "In which case I draw my own conclusions."

Judd's voice rasped angrily. "Well, you're drawing 'em wrong this time. Lora and I are *not* married."

"Then what were you—and all the papas and

mammas and the parson—doing at the church this afternoon?”

“What business is it of yours what we were doing?”

Cliff made him an ironic bow. “None. My mistake!” and started away.

But Cliff was his best friend. Judd reached out and hauled him back. “I’m sorry, Cliff—I—I’m kind of jittery tonight. As a matter of fact, we—we did think we might get married—then we changed our minds, decided to wait a year, but—well, naturally we don’t want that broadcast.”

Cliff said nothing for a moment, the two stood there in the windy darkness, facing each other, awkward and constrained. Then Cliff said, “That’s kind of too bad. Hannah saw the—er—party, too. And Earle. I suppose I can fix it with Earle all right, but you know gals.”

“Tell ’em we’re engaged. That’ll leave ’em something to chew on.”

“Okay. But what about the church? That looks kind of suspicious, you know.”

Judd gnawed his lip. “Tell ’em we were taking the old folks sightseeing—historic New England church—that sort of thing.”

“Okay,” Cliff said again. “By the way, congratulations.”

“Thanks!”

Judd hurried off. He could feel the moisture ooz-

ing from his palms and his cheeks were on fire. Well, thank God it had been too dark for Cliff to see that. But he had seen enough—he and Earle and Hannah. He didn't mind Earle so much, never had liked him, didn't care what he thought. But Hannah was different, a nice girl. Even nice girls, however, were gossips. If she didn't believe Cliff's story, the news of their "elopement" would be all over town by morning. That wouldn't be so bad if they'd really pulled it off. He realized suddenly how much worse the truth was going to sound. An elopement that actually came off had at least the dignity of melodrama. But this was just farce. This would make them laugh their heads off. And Lora would have to be around and hear them doing it while he would be on his way to Cleveland. They would say he'd run away—that was the way it would look.

He came blindly up against the low picket gate before the Paris cottage. Now that he was there, his courage all but failed him. For it came to him suddenly that he must face Lora's father and mother and the thought filled him with abject fear.

It took more than the physical effort for him to lift the latch of the gate. But he was only halfway up the walk, when George's voice hailed him from the porch. "That you, Judd? Come along in!"

Judd said, "Evening, sir!" and mounted the steps. "Is—is Lora around?"

"Yes, she's inside somewhere." His voice was neither friendly nor unfriendly. "I'll see if I can find her."

He got up and went in. Judd heard him climbing the stairs, calling, "Lora, oh, Lora, Judd's here!" And Judd took out his handkerchief and mopped his face.

Lora had taken off the white dress. She was wearing something soft and flowery, her throat and arms were bare. Judd got to his feet when she came out and said, "H'lo, darling!" They had the right now to greet each other as an engaged couple, but they stopped a foot apart, saying nothing until Lora shivered and said, "It's getting cold, isn't it?"

"Can I get something to put around you?"

"Oh, no. I'm not that cold."

He reached out suddenly and took her in his arms. She was all he remembered, slim and soft and warm, faintly fragrant. But there was a difference. Her hands did not lock, as they used to do, behind his head, her lips were passive under his. He held her close and thought his heart would break. "Lora, darling—darling! I've been wanting you so."

She moved gently out of his arms and across to the wide, cushioned swing. "Let's sit down, shall we?"

He went and stood beside her. "Lora! Is anything wrong, dear?"

"No. Nothing special—I'm just tired, I guess. I've been packing—"

"Packing!"

"We're going back to New York tomorrow—dad and I."

He sat down beside her. "To New York!" His first thought was that now he need not tell her that he was leaving, too. "Tomorrow, dearheart! How does that happen?"

"Dad and mother think we'd better—we were going soon anyway and now—something has happened—"

"What? Not—Lora, tell me!"

She looked down at her interlocked fingers. "Well, someone—that woman who writes things for the New York papers, you know—called mother up. She said she'd heard we were married—she wanted to know if the story was true so she could send it off to the papers."

"Oh! Is that all?" He drew her against him, held her close. "I was afraid—I thought it might be something serious."

"This is serious. I mean, for mother to have to explain—and she couldn't think what to say."

"What does it matter? What's an old gossip of a newspaper hound!" Now they would both be leaving, the story would die of inanition. "What does anything matter now that everything's all right with

us? We're engaged—all sure and proper. Do you realize that, my girl?" She nodded against his shoulder. "And listen! I'm going to drive mother back to Cleveland so I've decided to get your ring there. And Lora—if I can get back east in time, I could run down to New York and bring it to you. Maybe we could have a little celebration before college opens."

"That would be grand."

"Of course, it would be lots better if you could be along to pick it out, darling—the ring, I mean. But you know what I'm going to do? I'm going into Freeman's—he's the best jeweler in Cleveland—and tell 'em I want the swellest engagement ring in the place for the swellest girl in the world!"

"That'll cost you money."

"Pooh! What's money!"

But it was no use. They reminded Judd of his old roadster on a long hill. You gave it everything you had but even at that it barely made the grade.

The wind came rioting up from the sea, whipping the trees into cowering shapes, flapping the awnings at the windows, warning the Harbor that it would soon be in possession here. Lora rested, lax and boneless as a sawdust doll in Judd's arms, and as impassive. And Judd held her without passion. They were both wrung dry of emotion.

Lora lifted her head. "I'd better go in, Judd, and

help. There's so much to do and Dad says he wants to get an early start."

Judd bent his head and looked into her face. The light from the window showed her to him clearly for the first time that night: very pale, eyes sunk deep in purple hollows, the soft mouth drooping, the dazed, blank look of a lost child.

Judd said, "Darling, you're not—you're all right, aren't you? You still love me, Lora?"

"Of course. Only all this—" she stopped and lifted her hands and dropped them with a little laugh.

"I know—it's been pretty awful but it really *is* better this way isn't it?" She nodded slowly and he said, "If we'd gone through with it, we'd probably have regretted it all our lives." She was silent and he urged her, "Wouldn't we?"

She looked away from him, at the trees writhing under the lash of the wind. "I don't know. We never will know—now. Will we?"

Julia Paris came swiftly through the gate and up the porch steps. She said, "Hello, are you two out here in the cold? May I sit down?" Judd stood up, faced her nervously. Julia's voice, however, was impersonal and friendly. "I've just been chatting with your mother, Judd." She sat down in a rocker, Judd took his place beside Lora again, felt for her hand. Julia said, "We've been talking things over. I had to explain why we couldn't wait to celebrate

your engagement. I suppose you've told Judd you're leaving tomorrow, Lora?"

Neither Judd nor Lora spoke and Julia cleared her throat. "I'm sure you both realize how we feel about this—what happened today. But we were at fault, too, and now—well, we don't want to make any more mistakes. We want to be fair. But we want you to co-operate with us."

Lora's fingers went taut in Judd's. "You—you said we could be engaged, Mother!"

"Yes. Of course. But marriage is a more serious matter. I'm afraid neither of you realize *how* serious or you wouldn't have—but that's all over. Judd, what I'm trying to say is that both your mother and I think you and Lora would be in a better position to know your true feelings if you didn't see each other for a while. Say until after the Christmas holidays, anyway—"

"That isn't long, of course, and it will give you a truer perspective—give you a chance to see things more clearly. And then, too, this last year in college is going to be a hard one for you. Lora must realize that. You'll have very little time—"

"Plenty of men are engaged their senior year and manage to see their girls, Mrs. Paris," Judd said.

"Your case is a little different." Her voice rose and sharpened. "If your affection isn't strong enough to bear a few months' separation how can you expect

it to endure for the rest of your lives?" She waited a moment and then added more quietly, "In the circumstances, I don't think it's too much to ask of you."

They both heard the reproach in that, recognized the challenge. Judd said, "I'm agreeable to that, if Lora is!" His voice was full and strong. "We don't have to be separated to know our *true feelings* for each other, but if it'll prove anything to you, I guess we can stand it—can't we, darling?"

"Yes, I—I guess we can stand it all right," Lora said.

Chapter 6

THE ERA OF THE EMPEROR HADRIAN," SAID PROFESSOR Shore in his deep, rich voice, "was one of tranquillity and prosperity; it was also an era of luxury such as we so-called moderns have never known—"

Outside the classroom windows, the campus was turning gold and crimson. The late October day was warm as July, the windows were open to the chirp of birds and the spicy smell of burning leaves. An occasional bee blundered inside, and, maddened perhaps by the atmosphere of learning, almost battered itself to a pulp in an effort to get out again. Plump little Lois Amot, who had eaten her own and Lora's dessert at lunch, held her eyelids open with two fat forefingers and stared with tipsy intensity at Professor Shore. Joan Hudson was composing a limerick with that expression of grave absorption which had moved the Professor to pronounce her the most attentive student in his class.

"The Roman of the Second Century of the Christian Era, possessed all those so-called modern conveniences which we, in our ignorance, believe to be exclusively indigenous to our own day—"

Still gravely attentive, Joan finished her limerick, palmed it expertly and dropped it in Lora's lap.

“There was an old gent so pedantic,
He drove his poor class simply frantic,
So they took him one day
For a sail down the bay,
And dropped him into the Atlantic.”

Lora flashed her approval to Joan and passed the limerick on to Martha Franks. Martha read it sternly and slipped it to Clara Revere. Lora drew a wire-haired terrier on her notebook and automatically absorbed the surprising information that the Romans of the Second Century had had running water in their bedrooms. Not that Lora found it surprising. It just wasn't important. In a long talk with her a couple of days before, the Dean had told her earnestly, “The price of inattention is failure.”

Lora knew that this was so. She tried to be attentive; she had been an honor student last year. But a year ago she had been interested in learning things. If she got back a paper with a bare “Passing” on it, she stormed and boned and was rewarded by a red “Excellent” on the next. Her marks had been of vital importance to her. This year she barely glanced at her returned class papers and she sometimes thought with a pang, half bitter, half tender, of the naive girl she had been a year ago.

She swallowed a yawn, now, and looked lazily at her ring. The sun drew all the colors of the rainbow from the small, square diamond. It *was* small, but it was perfect. Perfect as the girl who was to wear it, Judd had written gallantly when he had sent it to her. That was the day after her engagement had been announced, "Mr. and Mrs. George Paris announce the engagement of their daughter, Lora, to Mr. Judd Harcott, son of Mr. and Mrs. Bailey Harcott of Cleveland. No date has been set for the wedding—"

So everything had been set right, set in the correct and orderly channel. Her friends had been thrilled, Lora knew she should be thrilled, too. As Judd had gaily pointed out in his letter, it was a real victory for them—Love Triumphant. But victory won at the point of a gun has its disadvantages. Lora could never look at her parents these days without being reminded of that dreadful afternoon in the little country church. She had looked eagerly forward to the day when she must return to college, welcomed it when it came.

But college was not much better. True, the girls who hugged and congratulated her and exclaimed over her ring, did not know the story that lay behind it. That had been a comfort—but it was her sole comfort. For she found that the life she had so dearly loved last year, the life of chapel and classes and

noisy dormitory meals; of twilight walks and shared secrets and midnight feasts and soda fountain romances—was no longer for her. She had a strange, sad sense of having passed through something that set her apart, of having known emotions that made her ineligible for the innocent, light-hearted campus life. One short summer afternoon had made all that difference.

Her classmates felt something of this. They said, “What’s come *over* Lora Paris!” Some of them said, “She’s just gone snooty because she’s engaged—” not really believing it. No one could know Lora Paris and call her snooty. Their eyes would follow her furtively as she went across the campus, her hair shining gold under the gilded trees, her bare legs as golden where they showed between her woolen anklets and tweed skirt. She *looked* the same, and yet she was changed. There was that faraway, waiting look in her eyes and she acted so—well, grown up; never wanted to have any fun—just sat around and read or wandered off by herself—

When they left Professor Shore’s class, Lora and Joan and Lois walked back together to the dormitory where all three lived. Joan asked Lora, “How’d you like my limerick?”

“It was grand,” Lora said.

Lois sighed and felt around in her pocket for a caramel. “I don’t see how you think of ’em, Jo. You

must have genius or something—want a caramel?”

“No, and neither do you,” Joan said and snatched the candy. “If you keep on like this, you’ll be rolling instead of walking by the time you’re thirty!”

Lois fished around for another caramel but before she could get the paper off, a girl planted herself before them. She was a small, sharp-faced girl with very bright black eyes and she was looking at Lora.

She said, “You’re Lora Paris, aren’t you?” Lora said she was and the sharp-eyed girl said, “Isn’t that funny? I know you just from Hannah’s description. Hannah Vines, you know? I had a letter from her this morning and she told me you were here and said to look you up.” She arched her plucked brows. “I was kind of scared to. I was afraid you wouldn’t want to be bothered with a dinkie little freshie.”

The words were humble enough but there was nothing humble about Elsie Hammond, which, it appeared, was her name. Elsie talked in a high, sharp voice and there was something incredibly quick and sharp in her bright, black eyes, too. She reminded Lora of an alert little hen. But Lora had been a freshman herself and remembered how grateful she had been for a kind word from an upper classman. So she introduced her to Joan who told her she was glad to see her and to Lois who promptly gave her a caramel and gobbled one herself.

When they had managed to shake her, Joan said

in her dry, boyish way, "Well, little Elsie'll get along fine if she doesn't fall down and cut herself on all that edge one of these days."

Lora smiled. "She's just got the freshman jitters."

"Too bad she had to be wished on you. Who's this friend Hannah."

"Hannah Vines. She's sweet. She comes up to Forks Harbor in the summer," Lora said and promptly forgot Elsie and Joan and Lois and the campus. Just the mention of the Harbor brought it all back so vividly, the beach and the sea, the *Reckless* rocking lazily at her buoy and Cliff and Judd swinging along the sand—"She's young, but the little thing has possibilities," Cliff had informed Judd that day. Her throat ached with remembering.

But the weekends were the hardest. Weekends the campus was all but deserted. Virtually every other engaged girl in college was enjoying a romantic interlude with her man just as every unengaged girl with the smallest pretense to charm had a prospect of some sort in tow. All Lora had were Judd's letters. She had one with her the Friday night after Elsie's advent. She walked out to her favorite meadow and sat down under her favorite tree to watch the moon rise and think of Judd. The moon was so clear and bright that she could almost

read the letter by its light. She had already read it a dozen times, knew parts of it by heart:

“—the longest weeks I’ve ever lived through. I don’t see how I’m going to stand it, darling. I suppose it’s good for my character, though. If it would net me an extra credit or two I wouldn’t mind so much—I’ll be needing all I can get at this rate—just can’t seem to rouse the old brain—”

Judd was finding it hard, too, this dreary pursuit of knowledge. Her lips curved in a tender little grin at the thought.

“—darling, darling, if I could see you, even for five minutes. But I expect we can’t be too greedy. Now that we’ve pulled off our grand *coup* we’ll have to show ’em we deserve it—”

They mustn’t be too greedy. They must remember that that “grand coup” of theirs was really a *coup de main*. They could hardly expect to enjoy the rights and privileges of a normally, peacefully, engaged pair. Still, it was hard sometimes—this waiting—this waiting for life to begin.

When she went back to the dormitory, it was late. Her soft-soled shoes made no sound on the tiled floor of the corridor. She was glad for many of the room doors were open. If anyone saw her they would want to know where she had been, what she’d been doing. She would have to hear all about someone’s

latest conquest, someone else was sure to mention Judd, ask why he never came to see her. They'd begun to make jokes about him; pretend to think there was no such person or that she was ashamed of him—that he was wall-eyed or lisped. Most of them had seen Judd's picture on her desk which made this a little easier to bear but it irked her all the same.

She reached her room safely tonight. As she went in, she saw that Joan's door was ajar. Joan had the room next to Lora's and she was evidently entertaining guests tonight for Lora could hear Lois Amot's voice—muffled, as usual, with candy—and another that she recognized after a moment as Elsie Hammond's. She couldn't help smiling as she thought of Lois and Joan trying to be polite to the "dinkie little freshie." She felt a little guilty, knew she ought to go in and take Elsie off their hands. But that was the last thing she wanted to do, and, while she hesitated there with her finger on her light switch, she heard the sharp, piping treble say, "But it *is* true. Hannah Vines saw them coming out of the church. She found out afterwards that they even had the license. If their families had got there five minutes later, it would have been too late."

Lora's hand dropped from the switch, she stood in the dark and heard Joan's scornful voice, "Well, suppose it is true. What of it?"

"Why *that's* how they happen to be engaged. They never would have been if it hadn't been for that. Hannah says everybody up there knew his parents were opposed to it."

"Why should they be opposed to it?"

"Because they don't think she's good enough for Judd. They never had any intention of letting him marry her. Her parents know that and they're just as much against it as the Harcotts. Don't you see it was just a trick to get 'em apart?"

Lois, whose mental processes, like her fat little legs, could never quite keep in step, said suddenly, "But how silly! I mean, if they'd gone to all the trouble of getting the license and everything—I mean, it looks so *silly!*"

"Well, it's one way of getting your man," Elsie said, "if you can't get him any other way. Only she didn't get him and she never will. He hasn't been near her all this autumn, has he? And he hasn't had her up to Haverton. He won't, either. Hannah says his mother's taken an apartment in New York and Judd's there every weekend and she keeps the place simply swarming with girls—"

Lora softly closed her door. She groped her way through the dark to her bed and sat down, shaking and terribly nauseated. She pressed her hands hard against her ears to shut out the sound of Elsie's voice, but she seemed only to be shutting herself in with

that shrill, triumphant piping. "They never would have been engaged—it's one way of getting your man." Only she hadn't got him, as Elsie had pointed out. "They never had any intention of letting him marry her—"

Tricked. But, of course, she had known they were being tricked. Something in her had warned her that day. That was why she had screamed out there in the church. That was why she would have defied them all and married Judd even then. *She* hadn't been afraid of the future! Whatever had happened, it couldn't have been so mean—so inglorious and humiliating as this! Tomorrow it would be all over the campus—probably was already; she would be the laughingstock of the entire college. "It looks so awfully silly—"

Silly! They had bought her off with false promises and a pretty little diamond ring and she mustn't forget the announcement in the paper. Only that had been honest. "No date has been set for the wedding—" No date ever would be set. She sat on the bed with her hands clenched now, her eyes blazing in the darkness. A trick! But Judd hadn't seen through it because he had a gentle, trusting heart. Suddenly she sprang up and turned on the light over her desk. She looked at the clock and saw that it was not yet ten. The drugstore would still be open. But she might not be able to reach Judd by

phone. A telegram would be better, surer. She sat down and scribbled her message:

“Come tomorrow. I must see you. Quite all right to disregard your promise. Will explain why when you come. If you do not wire me, will meet you in tavern tearoom at one tomorrow. Don’t fail me, darling.”

At breakfast next morning, Joan and Lois were unnaturally silent. Lora knew what a strain this must be for poor Lois who had all the secretiveness of a month-old puppy. But Joan had evidently scared her into silence and Lora was so touched by the dumb misery of Lois’s round, pink face that she passed over her own scrambled eggs out of sheer pity.

Joan said, disgusted, “There you go! She’s had enough—look at her! She’s bursting with food. Why can’t you eat your own breakfast?”

Lora laughed. Her cheeks were pink, her eyes brilliant. “I’m not hungry—too excited. Judd’s coming today.”

Lois choked and Joan pounded her on the back. “I told you she’d had enough, she’s just pushing it down! Judd, darling? Swell! When’s he coming? I want to see that man.”

“For lunch—at least I think he is.” She had not meant to tell so soon. He *might* not come. Something *might* happen. “I’m almost certain—I’ll know for sure sometime this morning.”

No wire came. Judd's daily letter, written before he had received her wire, of course, was full of love and longing. To Lora, in a fever of excitement, time moved with exasperating slowness.

At noon, on her way to telephone to the tearoom for a table, she ran into Joan who took one look at her friend's face and said, "Well, I guess that man of yours is coming, all right."

"I guess he is," Lora said.

"Goody! I'm all prepared. Let's see, six and a half feet tall, the shoulders of a Viking, the sex appeal of Franchot Tone—"

"Oh, shut up!" Joan knew perfectly well what Judd looked like, having seen his picture on Lora's dressing table every day for six weeks. "If you want to meet him, you might be lunching at the tearoom about one, darling."

"Who'll pay the check? Oh, well, I might even pay my own for a look at that Leslie Gable of yours." And she made a mental note to see that Elsie was informed of Judd's coming. "That ought to shut her up," she thought.

Half the upper classmen lunched at the Tavern Tea Room on Saturdays. They reserved their tables in advance to keep as many freshmen away as possible, keep them in their place. Lora engaged a table near the big stone fireplace and ordered Judd's favorite luncheon—kidney chops and baked potato,

sliced tomatoes and lemon meringue pie! A lunch for a king—a lunch for Hay's prince!

October was behaving more like its near neighbor, November, today. The air was clear and sharp, the first frost had been at work on the trees overnight; they were like great bouquets of gold and fire. Lora wore her new rust knitted dress and her tweed swagger coat with its flaring blue fox collar. She was nearly an hour dressing, brushing her hair, adjusting her little brown felt sports hat to the proper angle.

The tearoom was crowded when she arrived. As many men as girls, today. Men up from Boston, New York, New Haven to see their own particular girl. Great yellow chrysanthemums bloomed against fur collars, the place was alive with exuberant voices and laughter, the clatter of dishes; logs crackled gaily in the deep fireplace, even the starched little waitresses carried their trays with smiling ease.

Lora smiled, too, waved in this direction and that as she made her way toward her own table. Men stole quick, interested glances at the girl whose face looked so clear and vivid that she might have been moving in some invisibly operated spotlight. She had run her eyes over the parked cars outside in search of Judd's familiar roadster not really expecting to see it. It was a long drive. She could not expect him to be punctual.

She sat down and drew off her gloves. At a small table over against the wall she saw Joan and Lois solemnly munching celery. Elsie was there, too, with three other freshmen and an elderly woman. Elsie shrilled, "Hi, Lora!" and then spoke to the elderly woman who glanced over in time to catch the tail end of Lora's smile.

"Shall I serve luncheon now, Miss?"

"Not till my guest comes, please."

She kept her eye on the door. Tall men and short, dark and fair. Little girls trailing big, tanned, sheepish-looking men and trying not to look too triumphant; plain girls with plain, unprepossessing men, trying to look as though they preferred plain, unprepossessing men; girls with their brothers, trying to pretend they were some other girls' brothers.

The place was beginning to empty, Joan and Lois were dawdling over their ice cream, Lora's face felt a little stiff with holding its expression of pleased expectancy. Then, of a sudden, it was radiant. She stood up and waved, and Cliff Sidney, standing just inside the doorway, his eyes swinging over the tables, saw her and waved back and went hurrying across to her.

"Cliff, *darling!* I'm so *glad* to see you! But why didn't you tell me you were coming along? Where's Judd? Is he having an awful time finding a place to park? I'll get the waitress to set another place.

Darling, if I'd known you were coming, I'd have had a lovely woman for you."

"Never mind about another place. Can I sit here? You see, Judd couldn't make it, so I—"

She sat down and Cliff sat opposite in Judd's chair. She could feel the stab of eyes from a dozen different directions and she made her smile as wide as possible and her eyes big with welcome and motioned the waitress to start serving.

"—I thought I'd come along and explain. I just blew myself to a new car and I wanted to see how she'd behave."

"That was darling of you, Cliff. I'm so glad to see you."

"I'm glad to see you, too. You're looking swell."

"You don't look so bad yourself. He's all right, isn't he? Judd, I mean? He's not sick or—"

"Sick! Gosh, no. He's fine, only—well, he just couldn't get away—say! If this is the way you're going to feed him when you're married, you'll ruin the guy!"

When they were married. Her heart flopped over, she smiled into Cliff's eyes. Dark blue eyes set in his dark, lean, intelligent face. Dark straight hair brushed close to his head, a kind of bandbox freshness about him that had distinguished him from the other boys even when he was Hay's age. Lora remembered

well the day Earle Gracie had called him a sissy. Cliff had proved—using Earle's face for demonstration purposes—that because a little boy had courteous manners and a clean face, he was not necessarily a sissy.

He returned Lora's smile now and she leaned a little across the table. "Why couldn't Judd come, Cliff?"

"Huh? Oh. I guess this is the answer to that." He fished a letter out of his pocket and handed it over. "He was afraid you wouldn't get it today if he mailed it, so I offered to play postman."

"Thanks, darling."

She laid the letter beside her plate and he said, "Go ahead and read it if you like. I'm going to be pretty busy for the next few minutes."

But she shook her head, smiling. "It can wait—I'm hungry, too."

They ate and chatted lightly. Once Lora caught Joan's puzzled eyes and grinned cheerfully across to her. Cliff didn't mention Judd again. He talked of the *Reckless*, chiefly. It seemed she needed some new something-or-others and it was going to cost a whale of a lot to buy 'em. He and Judd ought to scrap her, he said, and buy a seaworthy tub.

"You know you couldn't do that!"

He said, "It'd be a darn sight more sensible than

spending a lot of money on her—but you can't be sensible about a boat, somehow."

Joan and Lois had gone, so had Elsie and her party. The tearoom was more than half empty when their coffee was served. Over it, Cliff said, "How about taking a drive in my new bus? I'd kind of like to see the points of interest."

"All the best ones have their men up for the weekend, I'm afraid," Lora said.

Cliff said he was referring to the flora, not the fauna and so they were both laughing gaily as they went out. Lora told him where to go and they followed a narrow road through a little wood all carpeted with golden leaves and came to an open place with a peaceful valley below them and gentle hills beyond. There Cliff parked his new car and smoked a cigarette while Lora read her letter.

It was a long letter but it did not take Lora long to read it. When she had finished, she folded and replaced it in its envelope and Cliff said, gazing through smoke at the distant hills, "Judd thought there might be something special you wanted to see him about so I told him I'd do what I could to—kind of—substitute for him."

Lora turned the letter over and over in her fingers. "Thanks, Cliff. You—I guess you know what's in this, don't you?"

"I've been too well brought up to read other peo-

ple's letters," he said. "Besides, there wasn't a tea-kettle handy."

She did not smile. "I guess you know what's in it all the same. You know the reason he couldn't come today was because he promised he wouldn't see me at all until the holidays and he doesn't want to break his promise."

He said easily, "Well, you know how that is—at least you will know when you grow up to be a senior. Judd's got a lot of boning to do—the last year is the hardest."

She looked straight at him. There was no one around now, she didn't have to act. "You're a senior, too, but you could manage to get away—"

"Yeah—I mean, that's the way parents look at it. You know how parents are. They think romance takes a man's mind off his work."

Lora shook her head slowly. "It's not that. They just don't want him to see me again—ever. Either his parents or mine. They don't mean him to if they can prevent it—and I guess they can."

"Don't talk foolish! You're engaged—"

"Oh, no we're not! Not really. I haven't seen him since that day—I guess you know what day I mean—even my ring—it came by mail, you know." She looked down at it thoughtfully, turned it this way and that in the sunlight. "But we're not really engaged. That was just a trick. I knew it was that

day.” She gave him a wry little smile. “I didn’t know the *real* reason why Judd’s people objected to me, then, but I knew they were tricking us. I guess Judd must know, too, by this time.”

“Now you’re being morbid,” he said. “Now you—hey, what are you doing!”

She had taken a small, square box out of her purse and slipped the ring off her finger. “Look,” she said. “I saved the box—wasn’t that thoughtful of me? It’ll be easier for you to carry—”

“Lora! Don’t be a little nut! What do you—”

“I brought it along—must have had a hunch. Will you give it to him for me, Cliff?”

Cliff turned and took her hard by the shoulders. “Do you realize what you’re doing, Lora Paris? Do you realize that Judd loves you! He’s—”

“Oh, no he doesn’t! He’d have come today if he had!”

“How could he? A promise is a promise.”

“No, it isn’t—not when it’s dragged out of you by a mean, dishonest trick.”

“You’re acting like an impetuous kid, Lora. And remember, you almost got yourself in a bad mess once by—”

“*Almost* got ourselves in a mess!”

“Well, this isn’t as bad as though you’d gone through with it.”

She whirled on him savagely. “How do you know

it would have been *bad*! How does anyone know! We'd have had each other at least!" She looked away quickly, said, low and tremulous, "And we'd have had something else—something we'll never have again. We were *sure* then. We'll never be sure again. It's terrible to lose that, Cliff."

"Being sure about things is one of the penalties of being young," he said. "You haven't any past to draw on."

"No, only the future," Lora said. "And no more sense than to try and reach out and grab it."

"Before it's ripe," Cliff said.

She nodded and laughed a little. "Well, that's all over. I'm not trying to grab the future now. I'm giving Judd's back to him—all free and unencumbered."

Cliff knew in his heart that this was what he had been hoping for all along. This affair had been a terrible blow to him, knocked his and Judd's post-graduate plans into a cocked hat. He had come close to hating Lora for that. But now he looked at her and compassion pinched his heart. He looked at the little face that had been part of as many summers as he could recall. Such a sweet, merry little face it had been, shining-eyed and eager. Today all the sweetness, all the light and youth had gone. Burning eyes, unhealthy flares of fire in her cheeks, the young mouth mutinous and bitter.

Cliff heard himself saying, “I don’t think you *can* do that, darling. I doubt if you can give Judd’s future back to him free and unencumbered.”

“I can try,” she said. “Do you think I’m going on being engaged to him like this—knowing it doesn’t mean anything. Being the joke of the century! It’s like being given a title without any of the privileges—and I’ve already got one title.” She laughed. “It’s a honey of a title. You know, I’m that Girl Who Almost Eloped!”

Chapter 7

THAT SATURDAY WAS THE LONGEST DAY JUDD HAD ever known. His thoughts had followed Cliff every mile of his journey. He would think, "Now he's at Middletown—" and then, "He must be near Wilma by this time—" and, finally, "He ought to be there now." That was at one, and, after that, he tried not to think of either Cliff or Lora, tried to work.

When he had telephoned his mother that he could not get into town this week, he had used that as an excuse. Said he had to stick around and work off some conditions. Those conditions were real enough, but his mother had sounded disappointed. "I've some people coming to dinner especially to meet you, darling. Hannah will be here, too." He said he was sorry but he couldn't possibly make it.

That was the worst of having her in town. Oh, it was pleasant enough in some respects and he couldn't blame her for wanting a winter in New York, wanting a little life, wanting to see the new plays while they were still new—things like that. And she had been pretty nice, giving a little party for him nearly every weekend because she knew he was lonesome.

She couldn't know that he didn't always feel like a party, that he didn't always feel like beaung some strange girl. When he had mentioned that, she had rounded up Hannah Vines for him. Hannah was pretty, too, and had the advantage of knowing Lora and didn't mind hearing Judd talk about her.

Judd had never known how much Hannah knew about that affair at the church. Unlike Earle Gracie, who had also been in Cliff's car that day, she had never spoken of it. Judd thought that was pretty decent of her. He hoped she wouldn't mind about tonight—but that was sheer egotism. Hannah had more men on her books than she could use up in a year.

At two, Judd went out and wandered over to Tony's Diner for a dish of spaghetti. He was in no mood for conversation and Tony's was almost sure to be deserted on a Saturday. But as he came abreast of the famous little diner, Earle Gracie's opulent cream and blue roadster with Earle at the wheel and two other men crowded in beside him, swooped in to the curb.

Earle said loudly, "Well, if it isn't Mister Harcott!"

Judd lifted his hand in salute, said, "Hello, Gracie!" and kept right on going.

But Earle was in one of his boisterously facetious moods. He called, "What's your hurry, Judd—go-

ing to church?" as a small boy might hurl a challenging snowball at an enemy's rear.

Judd half stopped, the hot color rushing into his cheeks, then he said, "Yeah," and hurried on.

He knew Earle didn't really want to fight, doubted, if it came to a showdown, that he would fight! He merely wanted an excuse to spill what he knew—or thought he knew. He had been maneuvering for that these past six weeks and Judd had often cursed the fate that had chosen the rich, loud, brash Earle Gracie as a witness of his retreat from the church that fateful summer day.

Earle and Judd had been classmates for three years but they had never been friends. Cliff tolerated him because since childhood they had both spent their summers at the Harbor. Judd had merely ignored him. But he had been difficult to ignore this year. The first day the two had met on the campus, Earle had greeted him loudly with, "Hey, Judd, how about going on a little sightseeing trip today? I know where you can find some dandy historic churches."

Judd had grinned and pretended not to understand. But never after that did he meet Judd without some facetious reference to a church. Judd avoided him whenever possible, but there were times, days like today when his nerves were on edge with longing for Lora, with wondering and

worrying, that his hands itched for Earle's throat.

He went back to his room without having lunched and set to work on an overdue philosophy paper. Philosophy indeed! When all he could think of was Lora. "Quite all right to disregard your promise," she had assured him in her wire. That did not sound like Lora. Something had happened, what *could* happen? He jabbed his fisted hand into his cheek and bent over his paper. He wrote, "Aristotle and the First Philosophy—" and stared out of his window at the dusty, wrinkled leaves on an ancient elm. His mind said,

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Mister
Aristotle,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy—"

Yeah, Shakespeare was right. There was love. Where did it come from, where did it lead? Why was it ecstasy, why was it torture! Who knew, who cared—so long as it *was*. And that was darned funny, for it was more torture than ecstasy. A year ago, for example, he had been a happy man with a heart light as a bubble. Now, here he sat, as he had sat hour upon untold hour these endless weeks, steeped in misery—"Hell!" he said aloud and looked at the clock and lit a cigarette. Cliff would be starting back by now—or pretty soon anyway. He ought to be here by seven—well, eight, then.

It was close to nine when Cliff returned. Judd was in his shirt sleeves, his dark trousers were dusty with ashes, the ashtrays on his desk held the stubs and ashes of countless cigarettes. He said, "Well, it's about time! Where the devil you been—Canada?"

Cliff tossed his hat on a chair and sat down. "The lights were agin me all the way from New London."

Judd stood over him. "Well, how was she? Did you give her my letter—you *saw* her, didn't you?"

"Yup, I saw her. Pull yourself together. You're behaving like an old woman."

"I feel like one," but he perched himself on the desk, long legs swinging. "What was the trouble? She's all right, isn't she?"

Cliff didn't know what to say, which was rather unusual for Cliff whose mental processes were, as a rule, clear and deliberate. "Yes, she's all right—that is, she's perfectly well, but she—" he stopped, dove into his pocket for the little jeweler's box and held it out. "She sent this back—I tried—naturally, I tried to—I didn't want to bring it—hell! Why don't you do your own dirty work!"

Judd was staring stupidly at the box. "What's that?" he said and reached for it. He snapped it open and looked at the little square diamond in its velvet bed. Then he looked across at Cliff. "What—what did she want to do that for?"

"How do I know? Dammit, why does anyone do

anything? She doesn't want it, I suppose!" His voice scraped harshly. Lora's face was still fresh in his mind, now here was Judd's—his best friend's—ravaged by the same, cruel, inexplicable force. "She says she doesn't want to wear it—because it doesn't mean anything!"

"Doesn't—mean anything?"

"That's what she said—I don't know that I blame her. Oh, I don't blame you, either. It's just a—mess! You better forget it." Judd was staring again at the little ring and Cliff jumped up and went across to him, laid a hand on his shoulder. "I'm sorry, fella—God knows, I'm sorry. I used to think I'd be glad if this happened, but I'm not. I'd do anything I could to make it right—but I guess nobody can do that. It's just one of those things."

"Yeah," Judd said. "It's just one of those things." He closed the box and gave Cliff a sickly grin. "Let's have it—what happened?"

So Cliff told him as accurately as he could, what had happened, the things Lora had said. Judd listened quietly, turning the fragile box over and over in his strong, brown fingers; occasionally he would nod as though Cliff's words checked with something in his own mind.

"I imagine what started it," Cliff said, "was that friend of Hannah's—some little twirp of a freshman—spilling the beans. I mean about—"

"I know what you mean," Judd said. "These things will get around, won't they? And you can't blame her for being a little sore. It's bad enough to have a man jilt you at the altar and make a public laughing stock of you but it must be even harder to discover that he jilted you because you don't move in the Best Circles."

Cliff said quickly, "She doesn't blame you for that part of it."

"No! You mean she believes I didn't see through it? Nobody could believe any grown man could be that much of a moron." He leaned over Cliff, chalky-faced, grinning. "But, listen to this and laugh! I thought it was all on the square. So help me, I did! When Mother took that place in town I actually believed it was because she wanted to see a little New York life. That's what she *said* and I believed her. Even those nice little parties of hers with all the lovely eligible girls sprinkled around where I had to be civil to 'em or fall over 'em—even then I didn't see through her." He shoved the little box in his pocket and slid off the desk. "I actually had the idea that people considered an engagement a kind of sacred thing. Would you believe that!"

"I wouldn't be too hard on your mother," Cliff said. "She probably thought—"

"She thought it was all for the best, as the dear things say," Judd said. "And it's a parent's preroga-

tive to cheat its young because naturally the young don't know what's good for 'em."

His coat was hanging on a chairback. He went over to it and dragged it on and started for the door. Cliff got up, too, said casually, "I didn't stop for dinner. You had yours?"

"Dinner? I don't know—guess I must have."

"Well, come on down to Brownie's and have a beer with me while I eat, will you?"

Judd stopped with his hand on the doorknob. Without turning, he said, "I'd rather not, if you don't mind. I—I'm afraid I wouldn't be very good company."

"Any company's better than eating alone," Cliff said. "Come on. I'm empty as your hat."

Judd saw through *that*. He knew that Cliff didn't want his company any more than he wanted Cliff's but it was one of the obligations of friendship to rally round the bereaved. Cliff linked his arm in Judd's and Judd grinned at him wryly. "You might leave me alone to brood a little."

"I might," Cliff said. "In fact, I will after I've had my steak and you've had your beer. You've no idea what an aid to brooding a good beer can be, my man."

Brownie's was noted for its steak and French fries. It was a small, meretriciously humble place with panelled walls and checked tablecloths and steins.

It catered chiefly to college men who could afford to pay for their meals in two places and eat only in one. Saturday was not Brownie's best day though earlier in the evening the place had been well filled and even now several late and strictly masculine dinner parties lingered over their beer and highballs. They hailed Judd and Cliff when the two came in and Brownie himself hurried forward to seat them in his best *maître d'hôtel* manner.

When Cliff had given their order, he told Judd, "You know, I figure I got fourteen miles to the gallon out of that bus today."

"Swell," Judd said. In the smoky light his face looked bony, all hollows and shadows. "Fourteen—that's something. I see our funny friend Mr. Gracie is with us tonight—he seems to be trying to attract your attention."

Cliff turned and lifted his hand in salute to the four men in a booth across the room and Earle called, "C'mon over. Don't be so exclusive."

Cliff called back, "Thanks, but I've got a date with a steak. You wouldn't want us."

Earle said, "Who's that with you? It wouldn't be Judd Harcott!"

"No, it's Doctor Dafoe," Cliff said and, in a low voice to Judd, "What's the matter with him? Did you cut him?"

"Didn't notice the guy till just now."

“Well, better say hello or something. He sounds a little tight to me, more than a little, and Earle’s touchy when he’s tight.”

Judd drawled, “You don’t say!” and fixed his eyes on the pink blur that was Earle’s face. “That’s too bad.”

Cliff gave him a look, leaned across the table. “Listen, I’ve been thinking about that estimate for reconditioning the *Reckless*. It’s a devil of a lot of money, Judd. With a few more hundred we could buy a new cruiser. What do you say?”

“What?”

“About junking her. Or better still, maybe we could patch her up a little and sell her for a few dollars.”

“Good idea,” Judd said. He was leaning against the high wooden back of the seat staring over Cliff’s shoulder, staring steadily across the room at Earle Gracie. “I never did like his face,” he said.

“Whose face— Oh, forget it!” The waiter brought his steak and Judd’s beer. “That smells like it might be good, sure you won’t eat, Judd?”

“No, thanks.” Judd took a long drink and wiped the foam from his mouth.

Cliff had his back to Earle’s table, didn’t see Earle get up and come, not too steadily, across the room. Cliff was saying, “After all a boat’s like a car, you’ve got to—” when he suddenly saw Earle standing there

beside them. He spoke quickly, cordially, "Hello, there! Sit down!"

But Earle was looking at Judd, his round face redder than usual, his jaw thrust out. "Would you mind telling me just what you think you're looking at?"

"Not at all," Judd said, without moving. "I thought I was looking at you."

Cliff said, "Oh, come on—sit down, Earle. Have a beer on me?"

But Earle said to Judd, "Well, I don't like it. I don't like the *way* you've been looking at me, Harcott. I thought maybe I'd better tell you I didn't like it."

Judd continued to sit there, his ruddy head against the ruddy back of the seat, his eyes half closed, staring indifferently at Earle. "Oh, skip it, Earle," Cliff said. "Judd's not responsible tonight—he's feeling rotten—he—he's just had a tooth pulled. You know how that is!"

"Yeah? A tooth pulled?" Earle said. Then he laughed. "That's funny. I thought he had 'em *all* pulled last summer. You know, that day we saw him coming out of the dentist's office—or was it a church?"

Judd's fingers, locked around the handle of his stein, loosened. He sat up. And Cliff said sharply, "Scram, Earle. For Pete's sake—can't you see Judd's sick?"

"Let him say it, Cliff," Judd said quietly. "He's had something on his mind all this autumn—must have been a strain. Better let him get it off his chest."

He had got very deliberately to his feet as he spoke and Cliff said, "Sit down—don't act like a fool!" He turned on Earle. "If you know what's good for you, you'll beat it, Gracie!"

"Is that a threat?" Earle asked. He placed both hands on the table and leaned to Judd. "I'll go when he apologizes. I'm not used to being stared at as if I were some damn freak."

Judd said. "No? That's odd."

Earle's red face turned purple. Cliff was on his feet, too, now, conscious that every man in the place was staring. He saw Brownie come out of the bar and make for them, a set smile on his swarthy face intended to convey the impression that nothing extraordinary was happening. Two of the men at Earle's table had come hurrying over. One of them grasped his arm.

"Better skip it, Earle. Old Dingle's over in the corner taking it all in."

"Old Dingle" was head of the English department but the presence of the entire faculty could not have averted the storm now. Earle shook off his friend's hand, shouted, "He started it, let him apologize! All I did was kid him a little. He's been sore at me ever since I happened to find out about—"

“You’ve gone far enough, Gracie,” Judd warned him, ominously calm.

“Not as far as you’d like to have gone that day your mamma caught up with you at the—”

Judd rested one hand on the table and hurtled it in a bound. The impact of the two bodies made a sickening thud. They went down together but were up at once, close locked, a double-headed monster reeling about the small, smoke-filled room, leaving a havoc of overturned tables and broken dishes and spilled beer in its wake. Earle’s companions and Cliff followed, clutching and protesting. The other diners, subscribers to the belief that man is not his brother’s keeper, flattened themselves against the end wall where they could enjoy the combat in comparative safety.

Brownie made one or two appeals in his character of respectable restaurateur—“Gentlemen, gentlemen!”—and then reverted to type. “Hey, quit that! Whatcha tryin’ to do—wreck my place! Lay off that stuff! Just because you got a little money and go to college—hey, I’ll call the police!” He did call the police. He went to the door and sent a series of anguished howls into the night: “Help! Murder! Poleeze!”

Cliff said, “Judd, for God’s sake!”

And someone else, “Pry ’em apart! Some of you fellows come and help.”

For there was no question as to the outcome of that impromptu affray. Earle was a big young man but soft. He fought with rage and terror; Judd fought with skill and a cool and careless zest that was fearful to see. The sound of Earle's hard breathing tore through the din of breaking dishes and shuffling feet and then there was another sound, like the impact of a bat and ball, and Earle dropped in an ungainly heap.

"Just kidding!" Judd said, standing over him, shooting his cuffs. "Come on, upsy daisy, you old kidder!"

But before Earle could rise, Cliff had Judd by the arm, was giving him the bum's rush, cursing softly and expertly. A small crowd had gathered outside the door. They wanted to know what was the matter and between howls for help, Brownie was telling them, inveighing against college men who broke up respectable restaurants "Jest because they got a little money and go to college—Help! Poleeze!"

"Shut up!" Cliff said. "We'll make it all right with you. Just send me the bill for damages." He shoved Judd through the crowd to his car. "Get in there—you—you idiot!"

Judd climbed in obediently. As Cliff took the wheel, he saw a blue-coated figure coming on the run and stepped hard on the gas. Judd sat silent, adjusting his tie, smoothing his hair. Cliff said

grimly, "Don't forget to powder your nose!" and found that he was shaking. Presently he drew over to the curb and stopped the car. They were well away from Brownie's now on a deserted, shabby little street and Cliff demanded furiously, "Damn you! What did you do that for? Do you realize what you've done! What did you have to do that for—on top of everything else! You—you *fool!*"

Judd shrugged. "I've been wanting to hit that guy for months."

"Well, you hit him! And old Dingle saw you do it. I suppose you know what that means."

"He scratched me," Judd said, running a finger along his cheek, "like a damn girl. I'll bet it's bleeding."

"They'll throw you out of college—you know what they did with Bancker and his gang after that brawl—and you can bet Brownie will raise hell. This is going to cost you your degree."

"What of it? Who cares about a degree? And they won't throw me out because I'm getting out."

"Listen, Judd, I know you had provocation—so do those others—even old Dingle must have seen Earle come over to our table, heard what he said. If you go straight to old Hardie and tell him the whole business—be perfectly honest with him, tell him the facts—"

"Swell! Tell him *why* Earle started it—what he

was *kidding* me about! Don't worry! They'll all know it soon enough without my telling them! And won't they have a good laugh!"

"Let them laugh. That's better than being thrown out at this stage of the game, isn't it?"

"I tell you they're not going to throw me out," Judd said. "Come on, let's get going. I want to pick up some clothes and my car—"

"What are you going to do?"

"You'll be surprised," Judd said.

It was nearly Sunday morning and dawn had already made dirty gray shadows of her windows before Lora had fallen asleep. Then she had had a terrible dream. She dreamed that she and Judd were back in the little church at Harbor Village trying to persuade old Frederick Hedd to marry them. But old Frederick said he couldn't because Judd had forgotten to bring his college degree and that without it no marriage would be legal. So Judd went home to get his degree and Lora was alone and the church was dark and she was frightened and called for Judd. Then it seemed that someone had locked him out and he was outside knocking on the door and Lora couldn't let him in because Hay had just come off the *Reckless* with a huge basket of fish and they were all leaping out of the basket and menacing her with hideous pop eyes and open mouths—

She sat up in bed cold with horror but realizing, too, that it was all just a dream. All except the knocking. There *was* someone tapping steadily on the door, whispering her name—"Miss Paris! Miss Paris!"

Lora recognized the voice of the chambermaid, Nettie, and sprang out of bed. She caught up her bathrobe and opened the door.

Nettie had an envelope in her hand and she spoke in a whisper out of deference to the day and the early hour: "A little boy just brought this, Miss. He says the gentleman asked him to bring an answer."

Lora had to take the letter back into her room for the long corridor was still almost dark. She huddled her robe about her and went to the window while Nettie stood in the doorway and waited. The envelope had Judd's name and address typed on its face but her own had been scribbled in pencil between the typed lines. Scribbled in Judd's hand. She was wide awake instantly, the last miasmic mist of her dream gone, her heart pounding.

"Dear Sir—

We take pleasure in advising you of the arrival of a new consignment of our noted Scotch tweeds—"

She flipped the paper over. Judd had written on the back,

“Darling,

I’m parked in the little lane that runs behind the chapel. Know where I mean? Turn right as you come out of the North gate and then right again. Get it? I’ve got the license and both rings. We can drive across the state line and before lunch you’re going to be the girl who *did* elope. Bring some clothes and leave a note on the pin-cushion for your Alma Mater. Tell her you’re retiring into private life and come as quickly as you can, darling. I’ve been pretty dumb but hope for a speedy recovery. Come, my blessed.

JUDD

P.S.: You might just tell the boy O.K. Then I’ll know everything *is* O.K. and it’ll make the waiting easier. Ten minutes is a long time. Can you do it in less, darling?”

Nettie stood in the doorway. Her eyes were puffy for she had been to a double feature movie the night before with her boy friend. But she was wide awake and terribly excited for it was no usual thing for little boys to bring messages to the girls at seven o’clock on a Sunday morning and she scented romance. Lora’s reception of the letter confirmed her delighted suspicions. To be sure Lora didn’t crumple the letter and hold it to her breast and gaze ecstatically at the ceiling, which Nettie’s experience of such crises as portrayed on the screen had led her to believe was the proper reaction of a lady receiving a love letter. Lora just folded the letter and shoved it back in its envelope. But Nettie could see, as

she afterward confessed, that her hands were unsteady and that she was all of a-twitter. "All of a-twitter and looking like she'd just won the sweepstakes," said Nettie later.

The window was still open and Lora sprang at it and closed it. Then she hurried across to her bureau and dragged open the top drawer, took out her purse and came across to Nettie. She had looked pinched and scared when she had opened the door but now, even with her hair all tousled and her bathrobe on inside out, she was radiant. She said, "Thanks, Nettie. Will you give the boy this—and tell him to tell the gentleman that—that it's O.K., will you? And this is for you—"

"Oh, I couldn't take—"

"Please take it. I want you to have it. And, Nettie, please don't say anything about this, will you—not until after I'm gone, anyway."

"Gone?" Nettie said. "Are you going away? I mean, you're not going for good!"

Lora laughed softly. "Yes, for good— Oh, you can help me if you will, Nettie, will you? I'm only going to take one suitcase and my weekend bag. Do you think you could find time to pack my trunk—and the books and things? Then in a few days I'll write and tell you where to send them."

"Sure. Sure, I'll be glad to do that, Miss, only—you mean no one knows you're leaving?"

Lora shook her head. "Not yet. You see—" she stopped. Nettie's thin young face was thrust forward eagerly, her eyes warm with excitement and sympathy. Lora burst out, "If you can keep a secret, I'll tell you why I'm leaving, Nettie."

Nettie drew a hasty cross on the bib of her apron. "So help me, Miss Paris, I won't breathe it to a soul."

"I'm going to be married."

"Married! Today?"

"Today."

"Golly!" Nettie said, breathless. "Golly! You—"

"Now hurry and give the boy the message, will you? Then if you want to come back and help—"

Twenty minutes later, Nettie unbolted the heavy hall door and Lora stepped out into the chill late October morning. A thin rime frosted the grass and the withered leaves of the tall old trees. The clouds, swollen with snow, hung low above the ancient, ivy-grown buildings. In the distance a church bell tolled for early Mass and, for a moment, it seemed to Lora that she had stepped back into some deserted, medieval world. She would not have been surprised to see Judd, in doublet and hose, come prancing across the broad campus on a high white stallion—

Instead, Judd had come in his shabby old roadster. She saw him, pacing up and down beside it, as she rounded the corner of Chapel Lane. Tall as

she remembered him, ruddy head uncapped. When he saw her he came running, long legs flying easily over the frozen ground, topcoat flapping. Her strength left her, she set her bags on the ground and stood there waiting.

“Darling, darling, darling!”

“Judd!”

His unshaven cheeks were rough, his kisses sweet and fierce, he held her close. “Lora! Dearheart, let me look at you.”

He held her off and looked and Lora’s eyes fell shyly away from his and her cheeks burned. “Judd, you must have been driving half the night.”

“What did you think I’d do? Take my congé lying down?”

“Darling, I couldn’t—”

“Never mind. I had it coming to me. It was just what I needed to jar me awake.” He drew her back to him. “Let’s not talk about it—what do you think of my plan?”

“What is your plan?”

“Well, I think this license we got last summer is as good as ever—if it isn’t, we’ll manage to get it renewed.”

“Can you renew a marriage license?”

“Why not? You can renew a car license,” he said and they laughed brokenly. “After we’re married, guess what? We’re going on a honeymoon. Now

don't get any ideas about Europe or Bermuda—but I guess we can find some place where we can be alone and get acquainted again—what's the matter?"

"We can't really, can we? You have to get back to college tomorrow, don't you?"

"Not I, darling. Little Juddy's school days are all over."

She tilted her head to look into his eyes. "Judd, you don't mean you're not going back at all! But you've got to—you'll lose your degree!"

"Do you think I'd rather lose you? Do you think I'm going to let you go again?" He kissed her eyes, laid his cheek hard on hers. "This time we're going to have a title that means something, darling—a title and everything that goes with it." He let her go and stooped and picked up her bags. "Come along, sweet. Is there some place around here where we can get a bite of breakfast?"

She followed him to the car and stood watching him put the bags in the rumble seat. "Yes—I think so. But, Judd—"

"Good—hop in—"

His arm was around her, helping her, but she shook her head. "I—I can't! I didn't know you—that would be awful—for you to lose your degree. I'd never forgive myself—it would be all my fault—"

He laughed. "Oh, no, it wouldn't, darling. I've already lost it—so you see it wasn't your fault at all."

Her eyes spread. She stared at him, puzzled and alarmed. "You've already lost it?"

"I socked Earle Gracie on the nose last night and when you sock a man it makes an unpleasant noise and respectable colleges don't like unpleasant noises. So you see—I'm out."

"Oh, darling! But it wasn't your fault—it was Earle's fault. He always was a bully. It *must* have been his fault. You could tell them that, couldn't you?"

"I could, but why should I? Come on, hop in!"

But she held back, shaking her head. "No— Oh, Judd, your parents will feel terribly. They'll never forgive me—never forgive either of us now if we—"

"Who cares!" he said savagely. "Haven't they done enough to us! We can't hurt each other any more than they've already hurt us. We're on our own, now—we have to live our own lives!"

She cried, "Yes—that's it! Don't you *see*, darling? That's why we mustn't mess them all up. Oh, I felt the same as you do. When your note came this morning, I thought nothing could stop us now, I thought that now we'd have our revenge—like people in books, you know. But that's silly! Don't you *see*—if we were to run away and get married now—on top of your trouble with Earle—being thrown out of college—it would spoil everything—ruin your life—"

"You didn't worry about things like that last summer."

"I didn't know enough. Maybe I didn't love you enough. Maybe they were right about that. I do now." She locked her hands behind his head and urged him, her lips against his cheek. "If you'll go back—"

"I tell you I can't!"

"If you explain they'll take you back, darling. I know they will. And I'll wait—I'll be patient. I won't mind what anyone says. Judd, if you truly love me, you'll go back."

"And if you truly loved me, you'd take a chance and—"

A car shot past the corner, stopped with a shriek of brakes and backed up. Lora slipped out of Judd's arms. He muttered, "This seems to be a popular spot," and opened the door of the roadster. "Let's get moving." But before he could help her in, two men were out of the other car and coming hurriedly toward them.

One of them called, "Just a minute! Your name Harcott, young man?"

Judd turned his haggard face and looked at them resentfully. "It is."

"Thought so." The man was beside them now, a large man, and as he spoke he flipped back his coat. It was the first time, outside of the theater, that Lora

had ever seen that gesture or the legal star it revealed. "My name's O'Ranny. I'm from headquarters. We just got word from Haverton to pick you up if you happened to come through here."

Lora took her foot off the running board of the roadster and slipped her arm through Judd's. He gave it a reassuring squeeze and frowned on Officer O'Ranny and his silent partner. "Pick me up? What do you mean?"

"They want you in Haverton. Seems that fellow you socked last night—well, you must have hit him pretty hard. The poor guy's not expected to live."

Chapter 8

THE HAVERTON PRESS HAD BEEN ON THE NEWS-stands since dawn and the old college town had partaken simultaneously of its coffee and the latest campus scandal—STUDENT IN COMA AFTER BRAWL. POLICE SEARCH FOR HAVERTON SENIOR'S MISSING ASSAILANT—so that it was an old story by the time Judd was delivered up to justice. But it was new to Judd, whose haggard unshaven cheeks went livid under the implication that he had deliberately run away.

Cliff Sidney said, "I told them they were all wet, that you'd no idea Earle was really hurt, that you'd simply gone to Lockwood to see your girl." Cliff had been waiting in the smoky little police station. He had confessed himself at once. "They came tearing up to the house about an hour after you'd gone. I told them the whole business exactly as it happened—but that damned reporter wanted a story—"

"Sure he wanted a story," Judd said. "Gimme a cigarette, will you?"

Cliff handed over his pack. "They can't hold you, of course. All they can do is arraign you on a charge of assault and battery and admit you to bail—"

"They can save their breath. I'm broke."

"Don't be touchy. I can rake up the money, if you can't."

"Thanks, but you needn't bother. I'll go to jail."

"You know darn well your people won't let you do that."

"My people aren't going to know anything about this if I can help it."

"You can't! And how do you think they're going to feel if you let these gorillas lock you up! And what about Lora?"

Judd's weary face lighted up, his bitter smile softened. "It's all right, Cliff—everything's all right, again. I knew it would be if I could just see her, talk to her. She—"

"I mean about your going to jail. How's she going to feel about that?"

"Don't you think Lora would rather I'd go to jail than appeal to my parents—after what they've done to us?" Judd said, low and savage. "Do you think it would make any difference to her—even if Earle dies and they have me up for murder! You don't know Lora!"

Cliff shook his head hopelessly. "Now you're talking like a romantic fool."

“Listen, this wouldn’t have happened if I’d had more faith in her and less in other people. I’m on my own, now. I’ll take my dose—like a man—and Lora will stand by me.”

An officer nudged Judd. “Come along, buddy.”

There is a nightmarish quality about all legal procedure that is devastating to a law-abiding citizen. Judd had had hours to adjust and brace his spirit for the ordeal but the atmosphere of blasé indifference and cynical disbelief common to every police court, reduced him to a state of almost speechless rage and defiance. When they asked him, “Well, if you didn’t know you’d hurt Gracie, why were you in such a hurry to get out of town?” he said angrily, “I wasn’t in a hurry to get out of town. I was in a hurry to get to Lockwood.”

“Yeah? What’ja want to get to Lockwood in such a hurry for?”

And Judd roared, “Because I was going there to be married!”

At the back of the smoky little room, Cliff groaned inwardly and a reporter from the *Press* sat up straighter and scribbled something on a crumpled pad. What he scribbled made a nice little spread for the morning edition of his paper—

HAVERTON SENIOR’S WEDDING PLANS
BROKEN UP BY BRAWL. JUDD HARCOTT
PROSPECTIVE BRIDEGROOM, JAILED IN

LIEU OF BAIL ON CHARGES OF ASSAULT
AND BATTERY. GRACIE STILL UNCON-
SCIOUS—

It was after he read that story that Cliff Sidney telephoned Bailey Harcott in Cleveland and an hour later, Bailey was en route to Haverton in an east-bound plane. He was a man of resource and decision and, when the first shock of Cliff's message had abated somewhat, his mind took up his son's problem with something of his customary cool precision: First Judd must be freed and cleared of the charges against him; secondly the college authorities must be placated; thirdly the story must be hushed up before it spread beyond the confines of Haverton. With that thought in mind, his first act upon arriving at Haverton was to buy a copy of the *Press*. The sight of those screaming headlines caused him to reverse the order of his activities. Five minutes later, the staccato symphony of the *Press* city room was invaded by his enraged roar.

"Where's the editor of this sheet! Where is he—are you the editor? My name is Harcott—what does this mean? How dare you print these outrageous lies about my son?" He waved the paper under the astonished editor's nose. "Treating a simple accident as though it were a—a Hollywood scandal! You'll retract this story in your next edition, you hear, or I'll start suit against you for libel—"

"Just a minute, please! There's nothing in that story that isn't—"

"Unmitigated lies! He had no more intention of running away or of being married than—I have—"

"Your son himself confessed—"

"Your paper is a disgrace to a respectable community like this! You should be editing a Broadway tabloid—"

The editor's manner, conciliatory at first, changed, his face darkened. He was a conscientious and politic man but he was no worm. His mounting rage kept pace with his accuser's and when after a final and terrible peroration, Mr. Harcott stormed out, the editor dropped into his swivel chair and mopped the indignant sweat from his brow. The young reporter who had covered Judd's case, eyed his boss furtively, got up and sidled over to the desk.

"Look, boss, I swear to God that kid said—"

"You needn't bother to swear. Listen, Harker, there's something behind all this. There's more here than meets the eye—the boy says he was going to be married, the father denies it." He leaned, narrow-eyed, across the cluttered desk. "Go on out and see what you can dig up. Find out the girl's name and run up to Lockwood, see if you can get anything out of her. If you can't, try the servants. Hunt up the boy's mother and try to get her to talk. If anything good breaks, get it in as soon as you can." He

brought his fist down hard on his desk. "That pompous windbag may have 'em all doing the goosestep in his own hometown, but I'm damned if he can come in here and bully me!"

The results of Mr. Harker's activities were sufficiently dramatic to be taken up by the metropolitan press and there was quite an impressive pile of newspapers on the Dean's desk when Lora was summoned to her office on the following afternoon. The President was already there and the Provost and the Dean and the Dean of Women. Julia Paris was there, too, with hot splotches of red on her thin cheekbones. And Marie Harcott was there, her heavy figure smartly gowned, her face paper white save for the red pencilled line of her mouth.

How long they had been in conclave before they had summoned her, Lora did not know. When she went in, no one moved, no one spoke except Doctor Shannon who said in her deep, masculine voice, "Sit there, please, Lora," and nodded to the empty chair facing her across the desk. Lora sat down, her back rigid, her chin high, looking at nothing, seeing everything; the dusty streaks from yesterday's rain on the windows, the trees shivering in the sunless wind that blew across the campus, the books lining the walls, the turquoise loveknot that fastened Doctor Shannon's lace berth.

The papers on the desk were folded to the story

that had embroiled the conservative old college in her first scandal. From where she sat, Lora could read the headlines upside down—HARCOTT'S FATHER DENIES SON'S INTENTION TO WED LOCKWOOD SOPHOMORE BUT MAID DISCLOSES PAIR PLANNED TO ELOPE—SAYS LORA PARIS CONFIDED SHE WOULD "RUN AWAY" WITH EARLE GRACIE'S ASSAILANT—POLICE ALLEGE FIANCÉE WAS WITH HARCOTT AT TIME OF ARREST—HARCOTT REFUSES FATHER'S OFFER OF BAIL—REMAINS PRISONER PENDING OUTCOME OF VICTIM'S INJURIES—

Lora knew those headlines by heart but it was interesting to puzzle them out upside down. She feared they had shocked Doctor Shannon pretty badly. She looked shocked. Her kind, plain face was terribly drawn and grim. So were the Provost's and the Dean's. Miss Chester, the Dean of Women, looked as though she had been crying. It touched Lora that they should take it like this; that the transgression of a student and a little unpleasant publicity could seem to them a matter of such solemn moment. She knew they expected her to regard it as solemnly and this amused her very much. With Judd in jail—a possible murderer—they could actually believe that being expelled from college mattered to her!

She had never intended to defend herself, would not have been here at all if it had not been for her mother's passionate insistence. Julia had come flying up from New York to her child's defense and Lora had demanded of her, "Do you think I care what they do to *me*! Do you think I could stay on here now!"

"Certainly you can! You shall! Do you think I'm going to let them expel you for something that wasn't your fault!"

"It was my fault that—"

"Don't *talk* like that! It wasn't your fault that Judd Harcott killed Earle Gracie—it was that woman's fault! I've told them so—I've told Doctor Shannon everything frankly!" Lora could hardly believe that this was her mother—her voice strident with passion, her face blotchy with tears, her eyes wild. "None of this would have happened if it hadn't been for her! She hated you and despised your family from the very first—if she'd let you alone, you'd have been all right—both of you. I've told Doctor Shannon all about it—I'm glad I did—before that woman had a chance to poison their minds—"

"What's she doing here? What did she come up here for? Why isn't she with Judd?"

"She's here because she *wants* to see you disgraced! She wants to ruin your life the way she has ruined

her son's—trying to drag you into this horrible—”

“She didn’t drag—”

“But she shan’t do it! Your father’s ready to spend every cent he owns to keep your name out of it—”

“He mustn’t do that!” Lora said quickly. “That doesn’t matter! I mean, it’s Judd—”

“Doesn’t matter!” Julia cried. “How can you say such a thing? Doesn’t matter that you’ve disgraced yourself and us! Do you want your name coupled with a murderer’s!”

“He’s not a murderer! He hadn’t any idea he’d really hurt Earle!”

“You’ve read the newspapers—”

“They’re full of lies! They said he was trying to escape. He wasn’t. He was going back of his own accord when those policemen—”

Julia reached out suddenly and clutched her daughter’s arm, her face thrust forward. “You weren’t planning to run off and marry him, then?”

“Yes—at first I was—before I knew he’d had trouble with Earle and wasn’t going back. Then I knew he’d lose his degree and I didn’t want him to do that—”

“You tell them that! You hear me—you tell them just that,” Julia said, her nails driving like sharp pins into Lora’s forearm. “Tell them you weren’t going to marry Judd—I don’t think they believe you

were. They're all on your side—the Dean and Doctor Shannon. Miss Chester told me so—she said no girl in college had a better record. If you just let them see you're sorry—”

If she would just let them see she was sorry—Lora thought of that now and almost smiled. But Doctor Shannon was opening her case and it would be impolite to appear to be smiling at the President's solemn phrases: “—deplorable affair affecting not only the student body but the faculty—all the aims and purposes for which the college stands—in fairness to her fellow students, in justice to Lora herself—incumbent on us to ascertain the facts—”

The deep voice rose and fell rhythmically. Lora sat quiet in her chair. The ghosts of last summer's freckles faintly speckled her white cheeks. Her eyelids were heavy with sleeplessness, her unrouged lips quite colorless. Only her slender, immature body and bright curls, caught back as usual with a narrow ribbon, were the body and curls of the schoolgirl these women believed they were trying for a regrettable indiscretion. Judd was in jail and if Earle Gracie died, he would be tried for murder and here were all these good, simple women solemnly intent on saving *her* from the disgrace of being expelled from college.

All except Marie Harcott. Lora asked herself as she had asked her mother earlier, what was Mrs.

Harcott doing here. She turned her head suddenly and looked at Judd's mother, her heavy, expensively corseted figure erect in the chair, her neatly waved iron gray hair showing beneath the brim of her small hat, her face set.

Doctor Shannon was saying something about the newspapers and Nettie, the chambermaid. Something about it's being unfair to judge people on the evidence of newspaper stories and servants' gossip, going on and on—

Lora, staring hard at Mrs. Harcott, said suddenly, "What is *she* doing here?"

There was a dreadful, stunned silence, then, "If you please!" Doctor Shannon said sharply.

"What *right* has she to be here?" Lora said.

The President's face flushed crimson. She thundered, "*Silence!*"

But kind-hearted Miss Chester said quickly, "I don't think Lora means to be impertinent, Doctor Shannon. If you'll forgive my saying so, she is quite within her rights in asking—"

"Mrs. Harcott is here at my invitation," Doctor Shannon said sternly to Lora. "She came here to ask you a few questions. Since you refused to see her, I felt it only fair to extend her the privilege of being present at this hearing. You must realize that Mrs. Harcott's son's freedom—his reputation, perhaps his life, are at stake—"

“Then why isn’t she there with him?” Lora said, frowning, twisting her handkerchief into a rope. *Her* mother was here with her. *She* didn’t care what happened to Judd, was determined only to protect her child. Judd’s mother owed him at least this loyalty. “He needs her there—”

“Lora!” Julia Paris said and leaned forward and shook Lora’s arm.

“Mrs. Harcott hopes and believes,” Doctor Shannon said, speaking slowly and clearly, “that certain facts may come to light here that will serve as extenuating circumstances in the event that her son’s case comes to trial—”

“Extenuating circumstances?” Lora said and took her eyes off Marie Harcott’s face and fixed them on the President’s. “What does that mean?”

The President leaned across the desk and looked at Lora and Lora realized suddenly that it was as her mother had said: the Doctor was on her side—they were all on her side, eager to prove her guiltless of anything more serious than unwisdom in the choice of a fiancé. “Mrs. Harcott maintains that her son was incited to this quarrel by some act of yours, that he came here at your request—”

Marie Harcott’s voice rang out sharp and urgent. “Not the day he—not Sunday. I don’t say that. What I do say is that she must have communicated with him in some way before that—threatened to break

her engagement to him if he did *not* come!"

The President's voice was grave. "You don't know that this is true, Mrs. Harcott?"

"I know it must be true, but I have no proof, if that is what you mean. I do know that she did break her engagement to him—returned his ring—"

"Just a moment, please. Is that true, Lora?"

Lora looked at her bare left hand. "Yes."

There was a little stir, a murmur, a quick exchange of glances among her judges. Doctor Shannon said, "Then you were not engaged to the young man when he came here Sunday morning?"

"No—I—no, I guess I wasn't."

"It was getting the ring back that made Judd desperate. He has never struck a man in passion in his life—"

"You can hardly blame Lora because your son lost his temper," the President said dryly.

Marie Harcott's face turned purple, her voice shook. "She sent back his ring not because she wanted to break with him but because she knew that would be the most effective way to make *him* break his promise to me. What happened Sunday proves that. She was going to marry him! Even though she knew he would lose his degree—that it would ruin his life. She would have done the same thing last summer as I told you—"

Julia Paris half rose from her chair, Doctor Shan-

non brought her open palm down smartly on the desk. “*Please!* If we cannot conduct this inquiry with some degree of restraint, I shall be obliged to dismiss it altogether.” She turned back to Lora. Her voice was definitely gentler, her eyes softer than they had been before. “We have no proof—nor, I believe, has Mrs. Harcott—that there is any truth in these accusations. We *know* only that you were, most unfortunately, with her son when he was apprehended—”

“Why should she have told that maid she was leaving to be married? Why should she have taken her suitcase with her? She got him up here to marry her—”

“That’s not true!” Julia Paris cried out. “She was trying to make him go back to college—she didn’t want him to lose his degree!”

“Silence!” Doctor Shannon thundered. “Lora, what have you to say to this?”

Lora flung out her arms. “Oh, what does it matter now? What does it matter whether I was going to marry him or not! What—”

“What does it *matter?*” the President repeated, harsh and quick. “It matters very much indeed! It matters to *us* whether you were guilty of such a deliberate offense against society, your family and your alma mater or whether you are merely the unfortunate victim of circumstance and unscrupulous

newspaper gossip. It is equally important that Mrs. Harcott should know whether you purposely broke your engagement to her son in an effort to lure him from his duties—thereby rendering him temporarily unbalanced and, as a consequence, less culpable, or whether he is solely responsible for his own actions.” She sat back a little in her chair but her eyes never for an instant left Lora’s intent gaze. “It seems to me illogical, to say the least, that you would be planning to marry a man a few days after you had voluntarily broken your engagement to him. It was wrong of you to see him at all, of course, since you were bound by a promise not to do so. If, however, you were not engaged to him at the time and if he came here of his own accord, persuaded you to see him against your better judgment—”

Now Lora could have laughed aloud. They were putting words in her mouth, offering her the politest possible alibi. Or was it an alibi? She had been *there* all right, but only because Judd had persuaded her against her better judgment! She could feel her mother’s breathless eyes upon her, read the eager entreaty in the President’s measured words, feel the others waiting, tense and hopeful. They were fighting for the honor of their alma mater just as her mother was fighting for the honor of her child’s name. Just as Judd’s mother was fighting—not for the sadistic pleasure of seeing Lora

suffer but to prove that the girl she hated and her son loved was indirectly responsible for his crime. And wouldn't Judd hate *that*!

But they were all fighting in the only way they knew for the thing that was most important to them. You could not blame them for that. It was not always possible to divide your loyalties. There were moments when every force of your being, every beat of your heart, must be concentrated on one alone.

Lora did not think of it quite like this, but she saw the way that she, too, might fight for the one thing that was important to her. She thought with a little pang of these kind women, with a sharper pang of her parents, before she spoke. But when she did speak, her voice was clear and bold, those extenuating circumstances must sound convincing.

"I didn't see him against my better judgment at all. I mean, I *did* know he'd come—after I sent back his ring. I knew if anything would make him, that would. Then—"

"*Lora!*" Julia Paris gasped.

Lora dared not look at her mother. "Nettie didn't lie. I did tell her we were going to get married. We'd have done it, too, if those policemen hadn't caught up with us. But Judd wasn't trying to *escape* at all. I don't think he even knew he'd hit Earle Gracie—he said when he got my ring back that he kind of went out of his mind—"

The awful silence in the room was cut by a sudden, sibilant sound. That was Mrs. Harcott. Lora looked at her blandly.

"Of course I didn't know anything like that was going to happen—I mean, I didn't know he was going to fight about me. I just wanted to get him up here. He didn't want to break that silly promise. But I knew he was crazy about me and I just kept after him—"

"You hear her?" Marie Harcott was on her feet. "You've all heard—"

"It's not true!" Julia Paris sprang at Lora and took her by the shoulders, shook her without knowing she was shaking her. "You told me you were trying to make him go back—"

"You all heard her! You see what she's done to him—ruined his life—"

"Please—please—"

"She had no intention of marrying him, I tell you!"

Their strident voices shattered the academic peace of the Dean's office. Lora slipped out of her mother's hands and went hurrying up to her room to pack.

Seven hours later she was saying earnestly to her father, "But, don't you see, dad, it was the only thing I *could* do! I mean, if Earle does die, they can say that Judd didn't know what he was doing when he hit him, they can blame it on me for sending back

the ring—don't you see that can't really hurt me and it may help Judd!"

"That," Julia said, "is the way she has been talking all the way from Lockwood."

She took off her coat and hat and pushed her hair off her forehead. She was a broken and desperately weary woman, and looked it. It was nearly midnight. Lora's unpacked bags still stood in the hall where the hall man had placed them five minutes before. New York sounded its nocturnal beat against the closed windows.

"I'm sorry—I know it's terribly hard on you," Lora said. "But don't you see, it *is* partly my fault. I mean, I did send back the ring and they did quarrel over me. Judd did act kind of crazy, too."

George Paris looked haggard-eyed at his daughter. That day, the days that had gone before it, had aged him. He was not a man given to retrospection but lately his mind had been tied, like a puppy to a stake—to that most futile of all words—If. If the Harcotts had never come to the Harbor; if Lora had never met Judd—if, if, if! Now George looked at his child, her small white face framed by the big fur collar of her coat, her eyes glazed, her round cheeks hollowed, and suffered as he had perhaps never suffered. She was so young! Why, Lord, it was only yesterday he was bringing her home from kindergarten and she was wearing a dress half as

long as his arm; a fat-legged, rosy-cheeked, sticky-fisted baby. What had happened, where had they slipped up? "There are no bad children, only bad parents," was the way that old parson had put it last summer.

Only bad parents. George said, "You'd better take off your things. Did you have dinner on the train?"

"After all, what's being expelled from college and getting your name in the paper," Lora said, "compared to what Judd's going through?" She stood up and began to take off her coat. "I mean, those are such *little* things—"

"She hasn't considered us—any of us—even for a moment," Julia told her husband in a dead voice. "She seems to have no pride, no shame—and that woman will see that the newspapers get every word of this and won't they love it!"

"Dad, you understand, don't you? If you'd been in my place and mother's life was in danger—"

"Don't be ridiculous!" her mother cried.

"That's not ridiculous! I love Judd! I'd do anything—"

"Yes! Sacrifice your whole future—your own flesh and blood! And how can you talk of loving him when his own mother—"

"Never mind, never mind!" George Paris said harshly. "No sense crying over spilt milk. What's

done is done. As Lora says, being expelled from college is a small thing compared to being tried for murder." He looked again at his daughter, a little grimly. "But it was a damned silly thing to do. This temporarily insane plea doesn't go down very well with juries these days—nobody but a bunch of hysterical women could believe it would. And I doubt if Judd'll appreciate it—make a man look pretty much of a sap if a little thing like getting his ring back from a girl'd set him crazy."

"Looking silly is better than going to prison! Dad, they couldn't hang him or—or anything—if Earle dies, could they? And if Earle gets well, they'll let him out, won't they? They can't do anything to him if Earle gets well, can they?"

"No, that is, if Earle recovers and withdraws the charges—which I suppose he'll do since it's pretty generally known he started the rumpus—here! Stop that, Jule!"

For Julia was sobbing, terribly, uncontrollably. Her husband went to her and put his arms around her. Julia sobbed, "How can you talk to her! Oh, what have I ever done to deserve this!"

Lora looked across at them with blazing, unseeing eyes. They didn't care. Judd could hang or rot in prison. All they could think of was their silly pride! Well, let them! She was glad, *glad* of what she had done!

Chapter 9

AS JULIA HAD FORESEEN, THE PRESS “LOVED” THE newest developments in the Gracie-Harcott-Paris scandal. What had started as a garden variety student brawl, had developed all the earmarks of a “love triangle.” Especially made to order for the tabloids and those publications which make no detour via the mind in their appeal to the emotions. Already in possession of a variety of lurid half-truths, they did their best to substantiate these by going direct to Lora herself. They would have liked *Her Own Personal Story of her Affair With Prominent Young College Senior* and were prepared to pay for it. They were not a little astonished and offended when their generous offer was refused by the irate father of the *Girl in Love Triangle*. But they treated what facts they had with ingenuity and imagination. They even managed to get hold of her boarding school senior year book and make a fair reproduction of her picture as of that period.

The picture was disappointing. It showed the breathless public a pretty round-faced, curly-haired girl, smiling and shining-eyed—hardly the portrait

of a lady whose charms had probably cost the life of one man and the freedom of another. But the caption read—*Lora Paris Before Judd Harcott Came Into Her Life*, which implied that the Lora Paris after Judd Harcott had come into her life was the sleeky, long-eyed siren of every tabloid reader's imagination.

The headlines required no imagination whatever: FIANCEE ADMITS SHE PLANNED SECRET MARRIAGE WITH EARLE GRACIE'S ASSAILANT—SECOND ATTEMPT TO ELOPE FRUSTRATED BY POLICE—PAIR OBTAINED LICENSE TO WED LAST SUMMER—CEREMONY STOPPED BY HARCOTT'S PARENTS—LOCKWOOD EXPELS SOPHOMORE WHO ADMITS BREAKING ENGAGEMENT IN HOPE OF PERSUADING JUDD HARCOTT TO ELOPE. TIRED OF COLLEGE, DECLARES LORA PARIS. "I Knew If I Sent Back the Ring He Would Come To Me!" Harcott Alleged to be Unbalanced by Break with Sweetheart at Time of Attack on Classmate. Counsel to Plead Insanity in Event of Gracie's Death—

Judd had read all this and more before his mother's visit that morning. When Mrs. Harcott arrived, she found his cell strewn with newspapers supplied by a thoughtful jailer who had sympathized with his distinguished prisoner from the start; considered

him the victim of a woman's perfidy and now had all his preconceived ideas confirmed by the press. He carried Judd all the papers with the biggest headlines in the hope that they would dispel any lingering affection the young man might still entertain for the cause of his downfall.

Judd read them all. He read the story of his romance with the Tailor's Daughter, a detailed account of their frustrated elopement last summer, their subsequent engagement. Mrs. Harcott had corroborated those details with every appearance of reluctance. Indeed, all her dealings with the Press had been marked by the restraint and aversion natural to a well-bred woman involved in her first public scandal. And, inevitably, the resultant story read like the familiar chronicle of the pure and superior youth lured to his doom by the wiles of a girl who was "beneath him." Lora was "The Tailor's Pretty Daughter," Judd the "Banker's Handsome Son." By implication, George Paris's prosperous establishment became a squalid shop reeking of steam and naphtha and his wife a complaisant mother who had aided and abetted her daughter's attempted misalliance for mercenary reasons.

Mrs. Harcott had actually *said* none of these things. Asked why she had objected to her son's marriage in the first place, she had replied that she considered the young pair incompatible. Mentally and socially.

She added that she did not in any way intend this as a reflection on Mr. and Mrs. Paris whom she scarcely knew—

Judd read all this by the light that filtered through the small, high window of his cell. He shouted with loud, derisive laughter at some of it but Lora's quoted confession raised muscles like ropes along his jaw. When he heard footsteps in the corridor, saw his mother's face at the square, barred opening in his door, he sprang to his feet and brandished the paper he had been reading.

"I thought you'd never come. Have you seen these—have you read this filthy tripe?"

Her gloved hands curled hard around the bars. "Yes, but never mind that now, darling. Have they told you that Earle is better this morning? Definitely better. They told your father—"

"They can't get away with this! Where did they get hold of it—did you give those swine an interview?"

She said, shaking, "Did you hear me tell you that Earle is better? What do you care about—"

"What do I care?" he shouted. "Don't *you* care? Do you want people to think your son is a cad and a half-wit—a half-witted cad, that's what this makes me look like! And all those lies about Lora and me—about her being thrown out of college! Did *you* tell them that?"

"Certainly I didn't—I didn't know it, but I'm not surprised if it's true."

"They can't. They can't treat her like that for something she never did!"

She said, with her face pressed close to those dreadful bars, "Judd, I think you must be mad! Do you realize what I'm telling you! Earle is better—the doctors say he may be well enough to make a statement this afternoon. You may be out of here by tonight!"

"Well, I'll be back in again tomorrow if they arrest people for killings rats!"

"You can talk like that—after all you've been through, after all we've suffered? I tell you you may be exonerated of murder and you—I can't understand you, Judd. I thought you'd be wild with joy! Instead—I think you must be out of your mind."

"Yeah, temporarily unbalanced by break with sweetheart!" His grin was ghastly. It faded and he thrust a finger through the bars and touched her cheek. "Sorry, but all this—on top of everything else—those dirty lies about Lora! What do you suppose the Parises will think?"

She made a gesture of despair. "Is that more important to you than the knowledge that you may be a free man again in a few hours?"

He went suddenly quite still, staring at her face with sunken, feverish eyes but not seeing her, see-

ing nothing, probing through some confusion within himself. "I don't know—it wouldn't have been before this happened—all this dirty, cheap publicity, but somehow it doesn't seem to matter so much now whether I ever get out of here or not." She made a horrified sound and he said, "Oh, no man wants to feel he's a murderer. Naturally I don't want Earle to die, but whether he does or not, the damage is done now, don't you see? I mean, before this," and he shook the paper in his hand, "I knew I hadn't done anything wrong—anything really low. Everybody knows I didn't mean to kill Earle but—God! I'd almost rather have killed him than have done this to Lora!"

She knew he was a sick man, hardly sane. She had seen that at once and had determined to say nothing that would not soothe and reassure him, but her self-control broke. She cried at him, "*You've* done to her! What has *she* done to you—"

"Nothing but love me—try to make a man of me—"

"Can't you *read*? Have you read the things she said herself?"

"She couldn't have said them! They're all lies, I tell you. She wanted me to come back. You *want* to believe the worst of Lora simply because you hate her—"

"Judd, stop it! I won't let you talk like this—

I won't have it. You're making yourself ill,—and you're killing me!"

He sank down on the narrow bunk that served him for a bed, and dropped his face in his hands. He looked enormous, crouched there on that narrow hanging shelf in that small bare cell. She looked at him through the bars and thought that they symbolized the impassable barrier that had grown up between them these past few months. She had believed that this morning that barrier would have been dissolved. When she had read the papers she had thought, "Now he will see what she is! Now he will see what she has done to him! He can't *help* seeing now!" and she had thought that perhaps all this tragic time had been for the best. Yes, if Earle lived, she could find it in her heart to be glad Judd had been thrown into jail like a common criminal. He would emerge a sane man, at last, cured of the passion that had so nearly wrecked his life—

Judd got slowly to his feet. When he stood erect his ruddy hair brushed the low ceiling. He came and stood with his hot face close to hers. "Sorry again. Guess I am a little nutty—"

"You're depressed. You should never have stayed here, Judd. You've no idea how that has hurt your father—that you wouldn't accept his help—"

"I got myself into this mess, I'll get myself out of it."

“In a way we’re proud of you for feeling that way, darling. But we’re working for you all the same. Your father is working like a soldier—he thinks they’ll reinstate you in your class. After all, as you say, they all know you didn’t intend to hurt Earle. They all know he started the trouble. And you mustn’t worry about what the newspapers say. These things are soon forgotten.”

“Not by me,” he said and the frown between his eyes deepened. “It can’t be forgotten by me. Don’t you *see*? *That’s* what I mean—”

She didn’t see. She only saw that the miracle she had hoped for had not come to pass. And, when she left him, even the certainty that he would soon be free was not sufficient to keep her shoulders erect or her feet from dragging.

George Paris would have given a good deal to keep those papers from his wife. His own reaction was a frenzied desire for revenge. He would sue the Harcotts, force the papers to retract every word of those infamous lies. When he thought of thousands of breakfast tables gloating over those headlines, he went sick and weak with rage and shame. But his knowledge of the press and human nature told him that nothing he could do or say would repair the damage that had been done. Only time could do that.

Julia, however, refused to subscribe to this. For the first time since Hay's birth, she was too ill to leave her bed and the doctor was called to attend her. She was in a fearful state. She had wept every vestige of beauty out of her face, her white hair spread in wild disorder over her pillow. Between spasms of weeping and nausea, she demanded instant retribution.

"They ought to be horsewhipped—like vicious dogs—no one would blame you—we'll never be able to hold up our heads again—unless they take back every word—"

George sat on the side of her bed and held her two hands in his and tried to explain. "I can't make them take anything back, dear, because they haven't actually said anything that isn't true—"

"Calling her the *tailor's* daughter—as though—"

"She *is* a tailor's daughter. Don't you see, the whole business is like that. The facts are true, only the implications are lies."

"We can sue that woman for defamation of character! The things they said about Lora—making her appear a nasty little hussy! A—a gold digger! An unscrupulous—"

"Lora did that herself. The Harcotts really believe she is to blame. You can't be too hard on them—"

"Can't be too hard on them," she screamed. "You

can say that! You, her own father—you'll just sit here and let them ruin her reputation—ruin us *all!*”

In the twenty years of their marriage he had never seen her like this. He had seen her racked by the pangs of childbirth, haggard and bedraggled after sleepless nights of caring for their sick children, but never like this. He said gently, “Try and be sensible, Jule. If I take this to court, it'll only give the papers something else to write about—more headlines. If we keep quiet, it'll blow over, be a nine days' wonder. I feel just as badly about it as you do, but any lawyer will tell you I'm right.”

She said in a terrible voice, “I could kill that woman! I could strangle her with my bare hands!” and George Paris laid his cheek on her mussed hair and thought he would never smile again.

When he left the room a few moments later, he met Lora in the hall. He said, not looking at her, “Keep away from your mother, she's ill—very ill. The doctor has just given her a sedative.”

“I wasn't going to bother her,” Lora said. “I was looking for you. Dad, I can't find anything about Earle in any of the papers. Did you see anything? I mean, anything about whether he's better or worse?”

Now he fixed his sunken eyes on her and his fingers curled in his palms. “Good God! I tell you your mother is sick and you ask me—do you realize what

you've done to her? Have you read the morning papers?"

"Of course."

"And you can still—" but the words would not come. He said hoarsely, "What kind of a girl *are* you, Lora? If you don't care about us, have you no shame for yourself? Do you realize what people are saying about you this morning?"

She shook her head impatiently. "Do you think I care *what* they say about me? I'm not thinking of myself!" and she turned and hurried back to her room. She did not see the involuntary lift of her father's hand, never knew how close he had come to striking her.

Lora went back to her bedroom and closed the door. She had the sense of shutting out a callous and hostile world and her heart was full of bitterness. That her parents should take it like this, that they could think of nothing but their own petty personal grievance, make her feel that she had committed a crime when she had done only what was proper and natural; what any girl would have done to save the man she loved! She had always thought of her father and mother as all that was noble and superior to the rest of mankind. Now they had failed her and her heart hardened to them. She could not think with tenderness even of her mother, lying there in the next room "very ill."

She went and stood at the window and looked down on Central Park West, alive with restless cars and hurrying people. Not since she had first gone away to boarding school, had she been in New York at this time of year; this dreary in-between time when the trees in the Park were still hung with the ghosts of last summer's leaves and the air was still hazy with last summer's dust. Up north, at Lockwood, winter followed swift and cleansing as a competent housemaid's broom on summer's heels. It had even snowed a little Sunday. While she was unpacking her bags she had noticed the slow flakes drifting past her window and thought of Judd driving those two hundred miles back to college—back to prison with Officer O'Ranny beside him.

She dropped the curtain and her eyes swung over the pleasant, girlish room. She had already made her own bed and tidied the dressing table and bureau and stood Judd's picture on her little rosewood desk. She had said when the maid came in, "I'll do my own room this morning, Lottie," and Lottie had nodded and backed out in silence, her eyes wide as a scared kitten's. Lora, thinking of that now and remembering what her father had said, thought, "I suppose she's read the papers!" and lifted her chin defiantly. As though she cared what Lottie thought—what anyone thought!

She decided to clean out her desk. That would give

her something to do. Her father had warned her not to go out or answer the telephone. "There may be reporters hanging around." But it was hard being shut in here with nothing to do, nothing more to do now but wait. Wait for Earle to recover—or die. And so she cleaned out her desk. The drawers were cluttered with wrinkled invitations and place cards and silly, girlish letters from her schoolmates—"Darling Lora, last night at Chloe's party I met the most marvellous man and *is* he a *man*, darling!"—"Dear Lora, You're lucky to have a cold because Miss Childs has one too and they got Miss Harriss in to sub and she gave us *all* detention simply because Lois tried to swallow a sneeze and we couldn't help laughing honestly it was *so* funny—" Lora tore the letters up. Had they really been written to her! Had she ever been so young?

At one Lottie came to say that lunch was served and Lora went out to the dining room. There was only one place set and it looked lost there on the long, polished table. If it had not been for Lottie waiting behind her chair, Lora would have gone back to her room. But Lottie, in her little waiting apron and cap and with her eyes bigger than ever, was watching her and Lora smiled on her brightly and sat down, to her fruit cup and creamed chicken.

It seemed to her that Lottie and perhaps even the

cook in the kitchen must hear every mouthful squeeze its way down her throat, the place was so still. It was the silence that made everything seem so much more dreadful for the Paris apartment was usually anything but silent. Always when Lora had been home from school the place had rung with young voices and reverberated with young feet. Last Easter Joan had spent the holidays with Lora and Joan's brother and a classmate had come to New York for *their* vacation and Hay had brought a bony, pink-haired boy home with him. The apartment had been alive with happy sound—the clank of the little boys' roller skates, telephone bells ringing, running feet and stifled laughter and messenger boys coming with flowers—

“No, thanks, I don't believe I care for any fruit, Lottie.”

She hurried back to her room, tiptoeing past her mother's closed door, and lay face down on her bed. For the first time in her life she felt completely alone and friendless, shut out from everything that had been dear and familiar, ostracised, despised, a pariah. She had only Judd now. He was all her world but how much more wholly was he hers because of what he had cost her! How much more perfect and complete was her love now that she had discarded all other loves for him. No, it was not like that. It

was, rather, as though she had poured all her other loves and fidelities into her love for Judd, strengthening and enriching it beyond price.

Lying on her bed with the blurred beat of the city sounding against the silence of her room, these thoughts formed in Lora's mind. She built them into a brave defense against her lonely despair until she had achieved a state of ecstatic martyrdom. Judd was in jail, she might not see him for years, but what of that? Love like theirs was deathless, it had already survived so much, what were a few paltry years—

She fell asleep, her cheek pillowed on her small doubled fist, her slender body lax as an exhausted puppy's. And, sleeping, the fever of those weeks of passion and defiance and despair left her and her young face in its frame of sunny hair was the sweet, untroubled face of the picture in the paper that morning—Before Judd Harcott Came Into Her Life.

She was roused by Lottie standing beside her bed and sat up and saw that the room was dark save for the faintly luminous windows. Lottie was saying, "Mr. Cliff Sidney is on the telephone, Miss Lora. I wouldn't of woke you but he said it was very important."

Lora was out of the room, flying down the hall, crying into the telephone, "Cliff! What is it? Tell me quick!"

“Is that you, darling? Well, I just wanted to tell you that everything’s okay. Judd’s out—”

“Out! You mean—Earle’s all right!”

“He’s doing fine—issued Judd’s reprieve like a little gentleman a couple of hours ago. I just left him—Judd, I mean. He’s gone over to the hotel where his folks are staying, to shave and clean up a bit then he’s coming to town to see you. He asked me to call you and date you up if you were in town. I tried to get you at Lockwood first—”

“Oh, Cliff! My—my teeth are chattering! Can you hear them? I’m so *glad*! Listen, how is he—I mean, how does he look and act and everything?”

“Great. Looks like old Prexy’s going to forgive all and take him back, too. So everything’s rosy and he’s swell—except he’s pretty mad about all those newspaper stories. He says after he’s seen you he’s going to beat up every editor that printed the stuff.”

“Oh, he mustn’t do that. You tell him he can’t do that, Cliff. Who cares about things like that *now*?”

He said, “Well, you’ve got to admit they did make him look like an ass. But he’s even madder about the things they said about you.”

“Well, you tell him I don’t care a bit. I knew he wouldn’t like it much but I thought it might help in case Earle—in case anything happened. I thought they might let him off easier if I made it look as though it was my fault—”

"You made—wait a minute! Are you trying to tell me all that tripe was true? You actually *said* all those things?"

"Yes. Of course."

"And you let them throw you out of Lockwood?"

"I was going to leave anyway. Truly I was, darling. Stop cursing!"

"I'm not cursing, little one. I'm moaning. I just pinched myself to make sure I was awake and it hurt."

"I guess it was pretty silly but I was scared to death that Earle might not get well and so I happened to think up some exterminating—I mean extenuating—circumstances. That's what Judd's mother called them. You see it was really her idea. I just kind of helped it along."

He said, "Judd's mother!" in a queer voice and she told him how Marie had come to Lockwood looking for extenuating circumstances. She laughed as she told it for it did sound amusing, now. But when she asked Cliff if he didn't think it was terribly funny he said, "Not particularly," in that same queer voice. Then Cliff told her that Judd was taking the six something train to New York and Lora said quickly to tell him he mustn't come to the house. She said that just now she couldn't even have Judd come to the house and they decided that she was to meet him at the Plaza at eight. "That lounge place

just outside the Persian room." Cliff said it was too bad things had to be like that, but in her heart Lora was glad. Their love had flourished in secret places, on dissensions and deceit. They would ask no favors now. They two would stand alone against the world—

Chapter 10

*M*R. AND MRS. HARCOTT HAD OCCUPIED A SUITE IN Haverton's best hotel, The Fieldston, during Judd's incarceration. And it was here the happy reunion of the three took place after Judd's release. It was here, with the door firmly closed against idly curious and well wishers alike, that Marie Harcott "gave way" to her overwrought emotions and sobbed out her heart on her tall son's shoulder.

A big woman crying is a dreadful thing—especially if she is your mother. It was a bad moment for Judd, and his own tears fell on her graying hair, he patted her shoulder awkwardly, forgot his grievances, remembered only that she was his mother. Bailey Harcott, pacing up and down the room with his hands deep in his pockets and his face somewhat pinker than usual, said, "Come on, come on, now, mother. Cheer up—it's all over, you know." Then he said to Judd, as man to man, "Funny thing—that's your mother. It's when everything's all over she breaks. That's the way she's always been. Come on, mother, got to be in shape for our dinner party—we've got to crack that bottle of champagne, you know."

She quieted at last, bathed her face and lay down on the sofa. Judd said he hadn't felt like shaving that morning, he'd better do it now and when he went into the bathroom, his mother said, "Leave the door ajar, darling," in the pleading voice of a little girl. "I know I'm silly, but do it just to humor me."

So Judd, deeply moved by their forgiving attitude and with his soul in sackcloth and ashes, left the bathroom door ajar and shaved his thin cheeks—he had lost pounds those last three days—and wondered how he was going to get out of that dinner party; how he was to make them understand that he must see Lora tonight. If it was true they had thrown her out of college—the thought cost him a nasty cut on the cheek. He mustn't think of it. Mustn't think of *any* of it right now. He was shaky as a palsied old woman.

He had half finished shaving when he heard Cliff arrive. Judd's first impulse was to call him into the bathroom where they could speak together in privacy. But he resisted the temptation. There had been enough behind-doors whispering where he and Lora were concerned. There had to be a showdown now. His parents must be made to see Lora as he saw her; they *must* be made to realize that this "romance" of his was a serious matter. He was willing to admit that he'd been an impetuous fool, more than willing to admit that they'd been darned sporting about this other awful business. But if they could be big about

that, they could be big about Lora, too. It was, of course, too bad he had to force the issue at this particular time. If things had been different, if it hadn't been for all that stuff in the papers, he would have waited. But he couldn't let Lora wait—after what he had done to her. He tied his cravat with shaking fingers and walked briskly into the sitting room.

“Hi, Cliff! Been washing off the shadow of my prison bars,” he said, and then, loud and hearty, “Well, how's Lora? Did you get her on the phone?”

Cliff said easily, “Yup. She's fine. Almost dropped dead with joy when I broke the news.” They looked steadily at each other, not one glance for Marie or Bailey Harcott. “I guess she's been pretty worried, poor kid.”

Judd jammed his hands in his pockets. “Did you ask her about that—is it true about that Lockwood business?”

“Yup. It's true. They let her out, all right. She's home—in town.”

“They let her out, did they?” He took his hands out of his pockets and looked at his watch. “You tell her I wanted to see her tonight?”

“Yup. That's okay. She said she'd meet you at the Plaza at eight. The lounge just inside the Fifth Avenue entrance.”

“Sorry to break up that party you were talking

about,” Judd said. He was looking straight at his mother now. There was no bravado in his voice, only stern purpose. “I wish you’d postpone it until tomorrow. I’ve got to see Lora tonight.”

Marie Harcott’s face looked stiff, a gray mask. She dropped her feet to the floor and sat up on the couch. “Would you—actually leave us—*tonight*—for that girl, Judd?”

“Now, mother, that’s something—” Judd started but his father who had been standing near the window had come over to the couch and he lifted his hand and held it, shaking a little, before Judd’s face.

“Wait a minute—don’t say any more, Judd. I hadn’t meant to go into this tonight—your mother and I thought we’d kind of dedicate tonight to you—kind of celebrate and postpone any unpleasantnesses, but since you’ve brought up the subject—you needn’t go, Cliff. You know as much about this as the rest of us, I imagine.”

“He certainly does,” Judd said with a grim little smile. “He knows *all* about it. He knows how I feel about Lora and why I—”

“Exactly. And now I want you to know how some other people feel. I told you I’d seen the President—in fact he called a special meeting of the board to pass on your case, Judd. I talked my head off and, as I told you, they’re willing to accept your apology and your pledge for future good behavior and re-

instate you in your class—but with one provision. That is that you break off with this girl. That you break with her finally and completely. They didn't say that in so many words. They said they supposed they could take it for granted that your affair with the girl was at an end. That's the way *they* feel about it."

Judd looked at him, looked at his mother. The fresh pink had left his newly shaven cheeks, his chin was trembling. "That's the way *you* feel—that's what you mean, isn't it?"

"You could hardly expect *us* to feel otherwise, but our opinion had nothing to do with their decision. Those newspaper stories this morning—"

"They were lies! I told you that this morning!" He wagged his head hopelessly. "This would be funny if it weren't so tragic. Lora Paris is the one those newspaper stories have hurt—she's been thrown out of college because of them. Because of *me*, really. That's why I've got to see her tonight. I've got to straighten this out somehow—"

"They weren't lies," Marie Harcott said. Her eyes glittered in her gray face. "Every word attributed to her in those stories was true, as I happen to know for I was there and heard her."

"What? You were—there! At Lockwood! What did you go up there for?"

"I went to ask the girl a few simple questions but

she refused to see me and the Dean permitted me to be present when they questioned her.”

“You were there!” Judd said, standing over his mother, staring down at her bewildered and unbelieving. “You heard her say all those things about our—”

“I’d no intention of telling you tonight, my dear, but perhaps it’s better for you to know at once.”

Bailey Harcott said, “You can hardly blame a respectable university for objecting to a student being mixed up with a girl like that. Oh, I admit she was an attractive little thing. I can understand how she’d have a good deal of appeal for the opposite sex, but now that you’ve found out what sort of girl she really is—”

Judd’s loud laugh broke the words off short. He cried, “Wait a minute! Am I screwy or what? I tell you Lora couldn’t have said any of those things. Listen, they said she admitted we’d have run off and been married if I hadn’t been arrested. She couldn’t have said that because that’s what I wanted her to do and she refused. She was trying to make me come back—she was worried to death for fear I’d lose my degree. Don’t you *see*—”

“If you don’t mind my butting in,” Cliff said in his easy, unflurried voice, “I think I can clear up this mystery. Lora just told me that she thought up all that stuff because she thought it might help Judd

—you know in the event that Earle popped off. And the thing came to trial. She had some cockeyed idea that if she took as much of the blame as she could, it might make Judd's case look a little better. She's pretty sick about it now, but her intentions were good—if a little nutty.”

Judd simply stared stupidly at his friend but Marie Harcott sprang to her feet. She said, “Nutty! I never heard such a ridiculous story!”

Judd said, still staring at Cliff, light and color flowing into his face until it was radiant, “She did—she said—she did that for me—God!” He turned and caught his mother's hands, swung them wide. “Did you hear that? Didn't I tell you they were lies—but that's the sort of thing she *would* do! That's like her—to try and take all the blame—let 'em chuck her out of college! Listen, did you ever hear anything so crazy—or so *grand*!”

But she jerked her hands away, her gray face had turned scarlet. “It certainly is crazy—it sounds *too* crazy to be true. If it is true. I fail to see anything *grand* about it. Neither did you when you read the papers this morning. You said yourself they made you appear feeble-minded—a cad—”

“That's true,” Bailey Harcott said. “She's done you more harm than good, if you ask me. And it isn't going to help you with the college faculty. You can't expect them to believe an asinine story like that,”

Judd looked from his father to his mother. He said quietly, "No. I suppose I couldn't expect them to believe it. You believe it, though, don't you? But it doesn't make any difference—it doesn't make you hate Lora any less, does it?"

His mother cried, "Why shouldn't we hate her? Ever since you've known her—from the very first day—she's brought you nothing but misery!"

"Oh, no, she hasn't," Judd said. "But you have—Oh, you haven't meant to, I know. Your intentions were good—as we just said about Lora. But if you hadn't hated her—if you'd tried to like her—for my sake—just a little, none of this would have happened."

"We had reason to hate her—"

"Not at first you didn't! You have now, though—I admit that. But she has plenty of reason to hate you too. Don't you suppose I know now why you went up to Lockwood? You went up there to bully and brow-beat her into incriminating herself—"

"I went up there to ask her a few civil questions—"

"Well, she answered them, didn't she?" He went across the room and picked up his overcoat and hat from the chair where he had tossed them when he came in. "Civil questions!" he said, his white lips curling. "You've never been even that—you've never been even civil to her. You talk of what she's done to me—look what *I've* done to her!"

The secret of Marie's hold on her two devoted

menfolks had been her freedom from pettiness, her reasonableness. Deep down in her heart now as she looked at Judd, watched him getting into his coat, reason was warning her to beware. But its voice was muffled under such a passion of resentment and despair and anguish that she could not have heeded it if she would. She looked at her tall son who had been the hero of every brave tale she had read since his birth, the star of every play, the voice of every singer; a better president and king than had ever ruled the world, and saw him turning from her for a sunny-haired girl he had known for a briefer time than he had nursed at his mother's breast. The girl who had precipitated the first harsh words between them, who had been the cause of how many sleepless nights and terrible days, who had all but made a murderer of him. And in her desperation she flung down that dreadful, futile ultimatum which is the last card on which desperate mothers have risked their all since mothers and sons have been.

"Judd, where are you going?" she said, without rage, the voice of a woman slowly strangling.

"I've told you, I'm going to see Lora—I've got to. I can't think of anything—can't *do anything*, until I've seen her. I'm sorry you feel the way you do—but I've got to go."

She said, "If you do—if you go to her now—after all this—you need never come back to us again. I mean

that. Your father will back me up, I know. I've borne all I can bear."

Bailey said, "That's right, son. Your mother's right. We've stood more from you than most parents would! This whole thing—it's got to stop. But you'd better think twice about it—you realize what it'll mean. The college'll let you out—I—you needn't look to me for anything."

"Don't worry, I won't," Judd said. "I'm a man—not a schoolboy. Ten years from now nobody's going to ask to look at my college degree. I—I'm sorry, I—but it's no use talking about it any more. The more we talk, the messier it gets. I've tried to explain—I've said I'm sorry and God knows I am. But I've got to go."

Bailey roared, "You'd actually do it! You'd renounce your own mother and father for—"

"I'm not renouncing anybody," Judd said. "I'm going, that's all." His voice rose, he cried out, high and piercing, "I'm just going—that's all!" and went.

Eight o'clock at the Plaza! The words sang to Lora as she dressed. She felt *so light* as she went from dressing table to closet, to the desk to smile on Judd's picture—so *light*! Like one of those bubbly balloons you buy at the circus. If you let go of it, off it floats, dancing and bobbing over the treetops. If she really let herself go, that's what she would do—go floating

up and up, bumping her head against the ceiling—a silly idea, but how could she help being silly now that everything was all right again, now that all this terrible business was over?

It was all over. Judd was free, Earle wasn't going to die, none of the terrible things she had feared had happened. She might have known they wouldn't.

Men didn't die of a sock on the nose. She felt sheepish when she thought back over those brief, dreadful three days. She had lost her head but how could she have helped it? And so had everyone else. Look at her mother—and Mrs. Harcott—but now *they'd* be all right, too. And they would know, as they had never known before, how useless it was for them to try to part true lovers!

She put on the hand-drawn linen blouse and blue wool skirt of her new town suit. Judd had never seen her in city clothes and her new suit was the most grown-up, the smartest suit she'd ever had. There was no fur on the collar but she wore two little brown animals that looked like sables, with it and her small felt hat was *very* small and chic—Judd probably wouldn't even recognize her at first. Darling—darling—

She unscrewed the top of her lipstick absently, thinking—so many thoughts—all jumbled together in a lovely, exciting picture. Judd graduating in June. Bachelor of Arts. She would go to Haverton—she would see him in his cap and gown, erect and hand-

some up there on the platform receiving his diploma. June. It wasn't so very long to wait—November, December—but November was already well launched and it was a short month and February was even shorter. Six months—well, seven, then. A June wedding with marguerites and dogwood—no, dogwood came earlier—LORA PARIS AND JUDD HARCOTT WED AT SIMPLE CEREMONY—

It was not yet seven and here she was all dressed and presently dinner would be announced and she would have to go through the motions of eating it. She would have to tell the family the good news about Judd and perhaps they wouldn't have calmed down yet, which would make it hard. On the other hand her mother might not be well enough to come to the table and her father might take his dinner in the bedroom, too. She hoped fervently that this would happen. Somehow it would be so much better if she didn't have to see anybody before she saw Judd.

She decided to do a little reconnoitering—see if the table had been set for three. She opened her door softly, tiptoed as softly along the hall. And suddenly she heard the voices in the living room, one voice that thudded against her heart with such awful significance that, for a moment, she could scarcely breathe. She stopped in the doorway and stood staring. There was her father standing in the middle of the room and on the sofa was her

mother in negligee and slippers and her hair pinned up in a comical uncombed knot. Beside her sat Hay, still in his overcoat, twirling his hat round and round and saying in that half-man, half-boy voice of his, "I don't care! D'yuh think I was going to stand for 'em saying things like that about my own sister! Making a lot of wisecracks, standing around whispering and giggling? I told 'em all that stuff in the papers was lies but when they didn't pipe down I laid 'em out—I laid three of 'em out cold!" The three had not been laid out cold however without a struggle. Hay's right eye was nearly closed, a swollen slit in a cushion of blue and green and yellow. There was a long ragged scratch along his left cheek, his upper lip was twice its normal size. "Then old Pepper had the nerve to call *me* down! I told him they insulted my sister but all he said was it was unfortunate for people to get their names in the papers because then when people did that they laid themselves open to criticism. That's all *he* cared! Then he told me to report to the headmaster but you can bet I didn't. I just kept right on going till I got to the railroad station, that's what I did. You can bet I'm not going back to that lousy school!"

All this time Julia had not moved. She sat there tense and still, her underlip caught between her teeth. Now she said, "Did you—did you do anything for your eye, darling? Does it hurt much?"

“Naw! It don’t hurt at all.”

“I think I’d better get the witch hazel—”

But Lora cried, “I’ll get it!” and flew to the bathroom and grabbed the bottle and cotton off the shelf. When she turned around she found her mother behind her.

Julia said, “Give it to me!” and snatched it and ran back to the living room.

Hay said, “Aw, don’t make such a fuss over nothing,” and glanced up and spied Lora, standing again in the doorway. “Hi, sis!”

“Hello, darling.” She came in, stood beside the couch. “Wouldn’t raw beef be better? I can ask Mary—”

But her mother ignored her, held out a piece of soaked cotton to Hay. “Hold this against your eye, dear—here, let me help you take off your coat first.”

“Aw-w—” But he took off his coat and plastered the wet cotton over his eye while his mother bathed the scratched cheek.

“How—how did you find your way home from the station, darling?”

“I just took a taxi—I was a little short so I borrowed the fare from the doorman. Will you pay him back, mum?”

“I will, dear,” Lora said and reached out to smooth down his mussed hair.

Quick and savage as an angry cat, Julia lifted her

hand and struck Lora's away. "Keep your hands off him? Haven't you done enough?"

George who had not spoken spoke now. "Better go back to your room, Lora," he said and Lora turned and hurried out.

She hurried down the hall to her room, closed the door and stood with her back against it still seeing her brother's battered face, still feeling the sting of her mother's hand. Presently she heard footsteps up and down the hall, heard sounds from Hay's room. Evidently he was being put to bed—"Aw, I don't wanna go to *bed*! I'm all *right*! What's a black eye?" Lora heard her father's, "Now, do as your mother says, old man," and, a little later there was the clink of dishes. Hay was having his dinner in bed.

The little clock on her dresser said seven-fifteen, seven-thirty, a quarter to eight. No dinner gong had sounded. The murmur of her parents' voices came from their own room now. Lora went to the dressing table and repowdered her nose. She thought, "I mustn't forget to pay the doorman." She brushed her hair and put on her coat and hat and the nearsables. She did all this hurriedly, stealthily, for of a sudden there was a new and shapeless terror at her heart. She dared not let it take definite form. If she did, she would never get to Judd because the thing she was afraid of now was *herself*! Some new-

born part of herself that was heartsick and weary and ashamed and, at the same time, very old and calm. And that new part of her *didn't want to go to meet Judd!* It just wanted to lie down and cry and cry and cry—

But that was absurd and cowardly. She whipped up her flagging ecstasy—ecstasy and deep despair and reckless courage—these were the things on which her love had flourished. She grabbed up her gloves and purse and opened the door, turning the knob very softly—and found herself looking into her father's face.

His hand had been lifted to knock, he dropped it and said, "I was just coming in to speak—" and stopped, his eyes swinging over her. "Were you going out?"

"Yes. I—just for a little while."

Julia had heard. She was beside her husband in an instant. She was still in her negligee, the comical knot of hair had come unloosed, her eyes and cheeks were red and bloated with crying. She said in a voice kept low on Hay's account and more terrible than a scream, "Where! Ask her *where* she was going!"

"I'm going to meet Judd. He's out—of jail—I was going to tell you later. He's all right—Earle's all right—"

"I knew it!" Julia said, still in that terrible re-

pressed voice. "She'd go—even now—even *now*—"

George flung an arm around her shoulder and pushed her gently into Lora's room, Lora made way for her, George followed and closed the door. Lora said, "I wasn't going to mention it—I was afraid you wouldn't want to hear about it right now—but Judd's coming into town specially to see me. It's only for a little while—he's going back to college—they're taking him back, you know, so everything's all right. But I have to go—"

"Perhaps you don't know," George said, "that your brother has run away from school. Perhaps you don't know how he acquired his interesting wounds."

"Do you think she *cares*! Do you think she cares about him—about any of us!"

"I do care! I—I'm terribly sorry, Mother. But don't you see, everything's going to be all right now, mother. Don't you see, everything—"

"You think so, do you?" her father said, a man controlling himself at tremendous cost. "Everything's all right! You can look at your mother, there—and your brother—and say that? You've got yourself kicked out of college, made us ashamed to look our friends in the face. You *know* how that boy's parents have slandered and insulted us, you know how they hate you—they'd rather see Judd dead than married to you and yet you'll put on your

best clothes and trot merrily out to meet him—”

“No! Dad, listen, please!”

“Well, you’re not going. You’re not going to meet that boy tonight or any other night, if I have to gag and tie you hand and foot and strap you to the bedpost! That’s the way lunatics are treated—that’s the way I should have treated you long ago and I wish to God I had!” Julia covered her face with her hands and Lora shrank fearfully back from the man who had been her kindly father. He advanced upon her, his face savage with fury. “Are you really so blind as to believe that things can ever be *all right* for you and that boy again?”

He stopped, breathing hard and loud, when he was almost upon her and Lora, feeling the dressing table behind her, leaned against it. She was a little faint and sick but not too sick to marvel that her father should have worded that new terror of hers so accurately. For she had known after she had seen Hay sitting there all battered up, that things could not be all right between her and Judd. Things cannot be all right with two people when they are all wrong with the rest of their world. The pattern of life was too closely woven. You could not take away two single threads without unravelling the whole.

“Now,” George said, “am I going to have to use force or will you stay of your own free will?”

She nodded quickly so that he would not say any

more while she was trying to find the strength to speak. And, after a little, she said, "I'll stay—I won't go. I'll stay."

She saw her mother's head droop lower and her father said, "Good. Someday when you're older—when you've recovered your senses, you'll thank us for this."

She nodded again and lifted the little blue hat off her head. "Yes."

"And so will Judd Harcott. You can bet if his folks knew he was planning to meet you tonight they'd rather have *kept* him in jail."

"Yes. But—I ought to let him know—he's waiting there. He'll be terribly worried—he won't know what to think—"

"Well, when he gets worried enough, he'll probably call up." He looked steadily into her white face. "If he does, what shall I say? That if he doesn't keep away from you he'll get shot or that you just don't *want* to see him."

She considered this, holding hard to the edge of the dressing table. It must be something final, something from which there would be no appeal, something that wouldn't leave any ends hanging out for him to cling to. He had to be made to see now that there wasn't any use. "Tell him," she said slowly, "that it just isn't any use. Tell him I said to go home and forget me because—it just isn't—any use."

Chapter 11

FOR A LITTLE WHILE JUDD WAITED OUTSIDE THE main entrance to the Plaza, watching every cab as it drew into the curb, with his heart in his mouth. But the chill of the November night soon forced him inside where he stood for the next fifteen minutes with his eyes glued to the revolving doors. At twenty past eight he left his post for a hasty search of the two side entrances then dashed back to the main lounge, fearful that Lora had arrived in his absence. At eight-twenty-five he sat down on a broad sofa from which he could see the door. He had eaten nothing for hours and the strain of the past few days seemed to be showing up in his knees. He told himself he was silly to worry about Lora. He could hardly expect her to be punctual at this hour, with theater traffic congesting the streets. Then, too, she might easily have understood Cliff to say half *past* eight.

He relaxed in spite of himself, lit a cigarette. It seemed odd to be sitting here alone in a hotel lounge, not having to worry about classes or trains, only a few dollars in his pocket and little more in the bank,

not even knowing where he was going to sleep to-night. He hadn't thought of this before—had deliberately closed his mind—as he had closed that door two hours ago—to every thought but Lora. After he had seen Lora, he could concentrate on the future. She had been part of that future for a long time, now she was all of it. As he, very likely, was all of hers. Her parents were no doubt as furious, as far from understanding, as his. Now they would have only each other; alone together they would face the world.

The thought was as stirring as an old martial tune and Judd's shoulders squared to it. He would show them! But coolly, now, sensibly. He had learned his lesson. He would get a job—some minor post in a bank, perhaps, where he could work himself up—then he and Lora would be married. They would have a quiet wedding to which, of course, he would invite his parents. They probably would refuse to come but, after a while, after they had cooled off, saw he was getting along all right, they'd come round.

He would be glad when that time came. It gave a man a nasty feeling to be on the outs with his own father and mother. He hoped that in his anger he had said nothing too bitter, too irrevocable. He wished they had understood things better. It would be fine if someone would invent a kind of television

contraption that would take a picture of a man's thoughts. That would save a lot of trouble and misunderstanding—if people could look into your mind and see the truth.

A man sitting on the other end of the sofa let out a grunt and Judd glanced at him. He was a round, pink, well-fed, overdressed little man and he remarked companionably to Judd, "See they've let that college boy off—that young Harcott who beat up his pal in that brawl."

Judd said gravely, "Is that so?"

"Yeah. The guy he socked is out of danger." He laid the paper on his knee and wagged his head at Judd, "But that's just his good luck. Might just as easy of died and landed this Harcott boy in prison for manslaughter or whatever they call it. And that's all the good this higher education would of done *him*."

Judd glanced at the door and back at the fat man. "I take it you don't approve of the higher education."

"You said it, I don't. It's not normal for a grown man to go to school, fool around with books and things. The best school is life, I always say. You can learn more from life in one year than you can at any college in four. And what you learn'll be of some use to you." The massive diamond on his plump, pink hand glittered as he waved it to em-

phasize his thesis. "A grown man needs responsibilities. I was earning my own way when I was eleven—selling papers, sweeping sidewalks—any odd job I could get. Now look at me." Judd looked and the fat man said: "Now, I'm president of the biggest paper company in the United States with more'n four thousand men under me—a lot of 'em college graduates, too! That's what *not* going to college did for me."

"Well, that's fine," Judd said, trying to think of the name of the biggest paper company in the United States and wondering if, perhaps, the fat man's name wasn't Fate and if paper might not offer a better future than a bank teller's cage. He said warmly, "I wouldn't be surprised but what you're right," considering in his mind how he could approach the fat man on the subject of a job. That would be a joke, if right here and now before Lora even arrived—

"You bet I'm right! Take this Harcott boy, for instance. Look at his record—chasing after that little gold digger, mixed up in drunken brawls, being chucked into jail—what good has college done him? It's ruined him, that's what! His goose is cooked."

Judd said, "Oh, I don't know about that—"

"Sure it is! What's he going to do for a living when he gets through up there? Who'd want a man like that working for him? No sirree, his goose is cooked."

Judd repeated that he didn't know about that, a little belligerently this time, and excused himself and got up. He glanced at his watch, saw that it was twenty to nine and went hurrying across the lounge toward the telephone booths.

George Paris delivered Lora's message to Judd very clearly and evenly and Judd understood the words perfectly. But he appeared not to have understood at all, said he was afraid there must be some mistake, that Lora had agreed to meet him at eight and hadn't come. He said the only reason he hadn't come to the house for Lora was because they both realized he wouldn't be very welcome right now. He said he could understand that—

“But I'm afraid you *don't* understand me,” George said. He knew it was his right as an outraged father and grossly wronged man, to hang up on that contrite, importunate voice. But he remembered the long-legged, honest-eyed, courteous boy of last summer and couldn't bring himself to do it. “I've given you Lora's message,” he said, “exactly as she gave it to me. I think she's made a very sensible decision—for both of you—”

“But, just a minute, Mr. Paris, I don't blame you for feeling—”

“Now, get this, Judd!” George said firm and loud, “Lora doesn't want to see you—tonight or ever!” and then he *did* hang up.

Judd hung up, too, and sat, still as death, in the small close telephone booth. It was the sight of a pretty girl all orchids and satin and slim bare shoulders, staring at him through the glass and jiggling her nickel in an impatient palm, that got him up and out of the booth. There were other pretty girls and men in evening clothes checking their things at the hat check counter opposite the booth, looking happy and festive. Someone in the Persian Room was singing—"Blue moon, you saw me standing alone, without a dream in my heart, without a love of my own—"

Judd went across the lounge, walking very straight and slow, a little frown between his eyes. He stopped beside an empty chair—one of those enormous, ornate, throne-like affairs peculiar to hotel lounges—and rested his hand on its carved back. He was not, at the moment, conscious of any emotion, any sensation save a terrible conspicuousness, standing there alone beside that ridiculous chair with people milling all about him. He felt as though he were seven feet tall with a spotlight focused square on his face and he couldn't do anything about it because he couldn't think what to do or where to go—couldn't have gone anyway for his knees were like melted butter and his empty stomach writhing with nausea.

He closed his eyes and opened them, set his teeth and hung hard to the big chair. The thing to do

was to get somewhere where he could be alone, think what to do next. In the meantime, look interested, pretend you were waiting for somebody who was late, maybe—he ought to be able to do that. That was what he had been doing ever since eight o'clock.

He was suddenly aware of the swirl of long skirts near him, a fugitive hint of perfume and found little golden-haired, blue-eyed Hannah Vines beside him. She said, "Judd! I thought it was you, darling!"

His fingers tightened on the chairback. He said loudly, "Well, well, if it isn't little Hannah!"

"Darling, where did you come from?"

"What? Who, me? I just got out of jail—didn't you know?"

"I wasn't sure. The paper didn't say you were actually *out*, darling! Isn't it marvelous?—I suppose Earle's all right. I nearly died when I heard—I've always loathed that man. And to think of them putting you in jail!"

"Behind the bars," he said, "like this!" and stooped and grinned at her through the carved chairback. "I bet I'm the only man you know with a prison record."

She laughed and put her hand on his arm. "You are *not*! Judd, listen. I'm with some people—we're just going into the Persian Room for dinner. Come on with us and tell us all about it."

"Sorry, darling, but I—I've got a date. I'm celebrating my freedom—"

"Well, celebrate with us. Come *on!* You *look* hungry—you look frightful—"

"That's one thing you can say for our jails," he said. "They set a grand table—nothing fancy, you understand, but good home cooking—"

"Idiot!" she said and shook his arm playfully and stood a little closer to him. "Judd, I'm dying to talk to you and I may not see you again. I'm sailing for France Wednesday—and that's something else! Who do you think is sailing on the same ship?"

His fingers were numb on the chair, he couldn't hang on much longer. "I give up, darling; I'm no good at guessing. Who?"

"The Parises—Lora and her mother and brother."

He took hold of the chair with the other hand, too, now, and leaned to her. "They are? Sailing—for France?"

"I rather thought you wouldn't know—I just this minute heard about it myself. I ran into Geordie Fields and he told me. I wasn't specially surprised—I mean, I rather imagined that you and Lora—well, that *that* was all over now!"

"Smart girl!" he said.

"Geordie said—you know he's something pretty important at the French Line—he said Mr. Paris called him up at his house tonight and asked him if

he'd personally attend to the reservations and keep their name off the sailing list."

Judd said, "That's a good idea—keeping their names off the sailing list. I guess they've had about as much publicity as they can stand."

She said, slowly wagging her smooth yellow head at him. "You mustn't let it get you down, darling. I can see you *are* down—you look awful, darling—but you mustn't. No one blames *you*. Everybody who knows you, just feels terribly sorry for you—"

"That's nice," he said quickly, grinning at her. "That's a real comfort. I'd like to stay and hear more but I've got to go—good-by, darling. Have a nice trip—"

It was so abrupt that she was staring at his broad, flat back before she could answer. She watched him go, her pretty mouth hardening. He was walking straight enough but she was pretty sure he was drunk. She had to think him either drunk or inexcusably rude and it would be inconvenient—with her friends undoubtedly watching her from across the lounge—to admit that he had been rude. It would be better to tell them frankly that he was drunk—"Tight as a lord, my dear!"

The clerk at the desk thought Judd was tight, too. Judd had suddenly found himself facing the desk and the sight of it with all the little numbered mail

boxes behind it, roused him to his most immediate need. He walked over to it and demanded a room for the night. The clerk saw that the tall, good-looking, pale young man was tight and without visible luggage. But he also saw that his clothes were expensive and well made, that he was a gentleman, and decided to risk it.

Judd reached his room not a moment too soon. For the first time in his life, he was actively and violently seasick. After a little while he dragged himself to the bed and lay down. His head ached intolerably and for a time the physical pain served as an anaesthesia against the sharper agonies of his spirit. But inevitably that lifted, leaving his mind clear as a polished mirror, reflecting the facts as ruthlessly.

It was perhaps the first time in months that Judd had had a clear perspective of himself and his condition; the first time in months his thoughts had not been stewing and smoking in some emotional brew. He was calm enough now, calm as death itself. Lora had gone. That, as little Hannah had said, was "all over." It did not occur to him to question the finality of her message. He had known when he had left the telephone booth that it was final. Finished. It was almost as though he had been expecting it. It seemed to him now that he *had* been expecting it, as though he had known all along that the thing these

feverish months had established between him and Lora was too tense and fierce and violent a thing to endure. You couldn't sail through life on a Roman candle.

There might, he thought, have been something else for them, something strong and quiet and deep. Lasting. In the beginning they had had that. But they had killed it. They had run it out of breath. So what? So Lora was through—little Lora without the U. Last summer he had been unable to bear the thought of leaving her even for a few weeks, of putting even a few miles between them. Now she was gone forever and presently she would have put three thousand miles between them. Well, that was sensible of her. He wished *he* could put three thousand miles between him and himself. But here he was with no Lora, no family, no college, no job, hung high and dry in "the wrecks of matter and the crush of worlds!" "Crash" of worlds old Addison should have said. Maybe he'd meant crash.

Funny he should think of Addison. That was the higher education as the fat man had called it. "His goose is cooked," the fat man had said. Judd rolled over and lay on his face and remembered that last night he had slept in a cell not knowing whether Earle was alive or dead. The bunk had been too short, he'd had to sleep with his knees drawn up as he always did in the *Reckless*. But he hadn't minded

on the *Reckless*. He'd better sell his interest in the *Reckless* back to Cliff. He'd need the money. And he'd better telegraph Cliff to bring in his things. He didn't even have a pair of pajamas. Fancy sleeping at a ritzy hotel in your underdrawers—

Cliff arrived at nine the next morning with Judd's bags. He took a look at his friend and ordered up breakfast. Judd lay in bed, his bare, muscular arms clasped under his head for why, he said, should he get up when there was nothing to get up for. No classes, no dates, no anything. "In me," he said, "you see that mythical character—a free man." He protested that he was not hungry but he propped himself up and sipped coffee and told Cliff about Lora.

Cliff listened, being careful not to look at his friend's face, painstakingly spreading marmalade on his toast. He had had to cut two classes in Judd's behalf this morning, a hundred memories and regrets were making the interview one of the saddest he had ever known, but his thin, pleasant face was expressionless as Judd's voice, telling his friend that Lora had ditched him, that he didn't blame her, that that was that.

When he had finished, Cliff said the usual things. He said he supposed the Parises were pretty sore. "But they'll get over it, give 'em time."

Judd said, "No, they won't get over it. It isn't

only the old folks, it's Lora. She's had enough. By the way, you don't want to buy back my interest in the *Reckless*, do you?"

Cliff got up and walked to the window and looked down on the city ten stories below. For a change the sun was shining, patches of green gave a specious summer look to the Park, the streets were alive with brisk, normal-appearing human beings moving normally about their affairs. Cliff turned resentfully from the sight. He said, "Look here, Judd, your family's still at the Fieldston. I understand they're not leaving for Cleveland until late today. Now that this other business has fallen through, why don't you come on back, finish up the year—"

"Are you kidding?" Judd said. "Or have I been overrating your intelligence all these years?"

"Don't be a sap. Why shouldn't you come back? You've heard that one about cutting off your own nose to spite your face, haven't you?"

"Yeah, but it doesn't apply. My nose is already gone—to say nothing of my face. Wouldn't I make one hell of a little college boy now—an old jailbird like me!" He sat straight up in bed and looked steadily at Cliff leaning on the footboard. "And don't talk about 'my family.' I haven't any family. You forget they've 'renounced' me. And when your parents renounce you that makes you an orphan."

"Now you're talking like a damn fool."

"Orphan," Judd said. "Don't forget that. You can bet *I* wont!"

Cliff said, "Well, what are you going to do?"

"That's the question. I haven't made up my mind yet whether I'll run for President or take up dancing. My record makes me pretty good political material, don't you think? And besides, there's my gift for diplomacy—"

"Shut up!" Cliff shouted. "You make me sick."

"Don't you suppose I know that!" Judd said. Sitting bolt upright there in the middle of the bed with his white, sunken cheeks and his mouth stretched in a broad grin, he looked like a grinning skull. "Listen, did you ever wonder why worms crawl under things? It's because they know it makes people sick to look at 'em." He thrust out his hand. "Go on back to school, old boy. And thanks for everything. Sorry to have dragged you through all this—"

"Skip it. What about the rest of your stuff—and your trunk? Where'll I get in touch with you?"

"I'll give you a ring one of these days," Judd said, meaning it, not knowing that he never would.

Chapter 12

THE DECK STEWARD SAID GOOD MORNING AND he was glad to see her on deck again—though he had not seen her on deck at all—and tucked Lora's rug around her feet. After which he bustled off to perform the same service for another passenger and Lora dipped her chin into her fur collar and leaned back in her chair. There was a severe-looking middle-aged lady on her left reading "Mind Versus Soul" and, two chairs down, a plump man asleep with his mouth open. Julia's and Hay's chairs were empty. Hay, no doubt, was off playing shuffleboard and Julia was writing letters inside. A few passengers were walking briskly about the deck but most of them were in their chairs, huddled under their rugs, lumpy sausages all in a row. The sea was smooth as ice and looked as cold; a cold and lonely waste of blue water and blue sky.

It was the first time she had been on deck since she had said good-by to New York. She had stood at the rail on the boat deck between her mother and Hay. Julia had been looking down at George's face in the press of faces along the pier. She had held

one hand doubled against her mouth while she waved the other and the tears poured down her cheeks in a steady stream.

Lora only remembered that afterwards—her mother's tears and Hay's excitement and the tumult of sounds all about her. At the time she had been conscious of only one thing—of the slow receding of the city. It, and not the ship, seemed to be moving, to be withdrawing slowly into some irrecoverable past. Then it was gone and the next thing she knew she was lying on her bed in the stateroom she shared with her mother and a jolly, pink-cheeked man was assuring Julia that there was no cause for alarm; that it was not at all unusual for people to faint from excitement—especially young people. And he grinned down at Lora and asked her, "How do you feel now, sister? Okay, eh?"

Lora had nodded her head and smiled at her mother and at Hay who looked scared to death with his mouth and eyes wide open. She had never fainted before, thought only mid-Victorian ladies did anything so silly.

The doctor had advised her mother to keep her in bed the first day or two and feed her up. She struck him as being half starved, he said. And he said excitement did that, too—took away people's appetites. He left some medicine to make her hungry, and for two days Lora had eaten and slept as

much as she could. Her mother uttered no word of reproach, she had been composed and cheery, more like her normal self than Lora had seen her in a long time. She had spent a good part of the day in the stateroom reading and talking to her child, planning what they would do in Paris.

"I think you'll love it, dear. Goodness, I haven't been there since you were eight—you remember when you and Hay stayed with Grandma Perkins? I studied a book called 'French Before Breakfast' all the way across, I remember. I wish I had it now—what is French for 'Will you direct me to the Louvre?' or wherever we happen to be going?"

Hay heard this and said stoutly, "I don't want to go to any old Louvre. I want to see the sewers—you know where Jean Valjean went when old Javert was after him?" and Lora and her mother had laughed together.

But this morning Julia had come back from the library where she had gone to get Lora a book and Lora saw that something had happened. Her mother's cheeks were bright pink, her voice jerky and shrill. "Who do you think is on board?" she said. "Hannah Vines and her mother—I just ran into them in the library."

Lora sat up in bed! "Hannah! Well, that—that's funny, isn't it? Are they going to Paris, too?"

"I don't know—they didn't say." Julia turned to

the dressing table, began to move the toilet articles about. "They didn't *say* much of anything."

Lora sat, hugging her knees, staring straight before her, her white face going slowly crimson. "You—you mean they snubbed you?"

"Mrs. Vines made it pretty plain that she wasn't exactly pleased to see me," Julia said. She laughed a little, picked up her powder puff and laid it down. "Of course, Mrs. Vines and I have never been very intimate—still, you would think she had known us well enough to—give us the benefit of the doubt—but I guess that's a little too much to expect."

Yes, that was, perhaps, a little too much to expect. Headlines were pretty impressive things. Lora said in a low, shamed voice, "I'm sorry, mother."

"It's too bad. I'd hoped—there are so few people traveling this time of year—" She turned and looked at Lora for the first time. "Since they *are* on board, we'll have to make the best of it. I think—as soon as you feel you can—that if you could get up, go out on deck and come down to the dining salon, it would look better, Lora. If you stay down here, it will look as though you were afraid to—it's an admission of guilt, my dear. I mean, if you could mingle a little with the other passengers—there are some nice-looking young people on board—men and girls, too."

She did *not* say, "This is the least you can do for

me. You have already brought such shame and sorrow into my life as I never dreamed of and it is on your account that I have had to leave my husband, my home, disrupt my life and run away like a criminal."

She did not say these things, but Lora heard them all the same and the burden of her humiliation was almost more than she could bear. She said, "I was going to get up today. I feel loads better—I feel fine, really," and flung off the bedclothes and stood up as she said it. "It looks like a lovely day, too—"

She sat now with her eyes on the empty sea. When anyone passed her, she dropped her lids and did not lift them again until the footsteps had passed her chair. She thought she would die if she were to see Hannah, she thought she would die if anyone spoke to her. And, suddenly, from halfway down the deck, Hay's voice hailed her. "Hi, sis!" and the somnolent sausages stirred in their rugs at the sound of that raspy, adolescent voice.

Lora looked and waved and then her heart began to thump. Hay had a young man in tow; a tall, darkish young man in tweeds. The two of them stopped beside Lora's chair and Hay said, legs apart, eyes triumphant, "Meet my friend, Oliver Hard. This is my sister, Lora, Ollie!" and stood back, pleased and hopeful as a nice dog bringing his best bone to his master's feet.

Lora smiled and said "How do you do?" and the young man said, "How are you this morning? Feeling better?"

"Yes, thank you. I'm fine."

"Good for you! Hay here has been bringing me hourly bulletins of your condition. I've been worried about you."

Hay said, elaborately casual, "Well, anyone's likely to be seasick."

"That's true—if they don't happen to know about my cure," Hay's friend said. "Maybe you won't believe it but I've got a cure for *mal de mer* that is absolutely infallible."

He said it gravely but his dark eyes twinkled at her from under the visor of his cap. They were merry, slightly mocking eyes that looked as though they had seen a good deal of the world, especially by night. "Have you?" Lora said, trying to look interested. "What is it?"

"Something I invented myself once in a *very* acute emergency. I'm going to have one made up for you."

"No, please—"

"Now, don't move—where's that steward—don't you budge and in ten minutes if you don't feel like *swimming* to France, I'll drink one myself."

He hurried off in search of the steward and Hay leaned over his sister. "Look, isn't he a swell guy?"

We've been playing deck tennis and he said he was dying to meet you and I told him you were seasick and he told me about this drink he made up and said he wished you'd try it. Listen, don't you think he's a swell-looking guy? Almost as swell-looking as—I mean, I think he's a prince, don't you?"

"I—I think he must be, darling."

"He's been crazy to meet you. He asked me about you yesterday. He said he heard I had a swell sister on board and I thought maybe if you could—I thought maybe he'd kind of cheer you up—"

He broke off for Mr. Hard was back with the steward in tow and the steward was carrying a long stemmed glass on a little tray. Hay thumped his leg and announced loudly, "Well, I'll have to be stepping. I got a date to play shuffleboard with a guy," and swaggered off.

"Now, the way we do this," said Ollie Hard, "is drink her straight down. No toying with the thing, you understand. When I say three, down she goes. One, two—"

At three, Lora swallowed the infallible cure for *mal de mer*. It was rather sweetish and smooth but it tore through her throat like a red hot poker. She coughed and blinked and Mr. Hard said, "Good girl! How was it?"

"Terribly hot—but it does feel good now it's down—"

"You wait. You don't know the half of it yet."

He sat down on the footrest of her mother's empty chair and pushed a well-worn little button in his mind marked Harmless Babble for Doubtful Prospects for he had no intention of committing himself for the duration of the voyage to this unique acquaintance. He was a young man of rich social experience and, consequently, wary. But he had been curious to see this girl for rumor had it that she was a dangerous young person, a lovely menace to his sex, a woeful trial to her respectable parents. In short, a little devil!

All this had sounded very promising indeed, but he was disappointed. She didn't look at all like her reputation. She was no beauty and she was appallingly young, in addition to which she looked half dead with those woebegone gray-green eyes, her unrouged mouth drooping. Still she had been ill and now that his cure was bringing some color into her cheeks, he could see that she was pretty in a childish, unsophisticated way.

"So they're shipping me over to take this other fellow's place with the company," he said. "And there I'll be, marooned down there in this God-forsaken French village three thousand miles from a good Martini."

"You can always fall back on your cure," Lora said, doing her best to live up to Hay's swell guy.

"It's terribly potent. I can feel it all the way down to my toes."

He gave her a sharp glance. "Maybe you'd better get up and move around a bit," he said and flipped off her steamer rug. "Come along."

She stood up. She did feel queer but pleasantly so and she was grateful to this strange young man. She smiled up at him to show him she was grateful and he drew her hand under his arm and gave it a little squeeze and they swung down the deck.

"It was horrid of Hay to dump me on you this way."

"Dump nothing. I've been all of a dither to meet you."

Lora smiled at him again. She felt a little as though she were on roller skates, with the steamer chairs and the sea flowing smoothly past her on either side and the fresh wind in her face. "I begin to think you were right about that cure of yours," she said as they rounded the ship's bow.

"Sure I was right—hold tight, darling, traffic's getting congested."

She had lowered her head against the wind, but now she glanced up and saw two girls coming, Hannah Vines and a pretty, dark girl she did not know, swinging along arm in arm. The thing she had dreaded was about to happen and, thanks no doubt to Ollie's cure and his friendly presence, she didn't

mind at all. She was *glad* to see Hannah. After all, Hannah was her old friend. She told her new friend excitedly, "I know that girl—the blonde one. She's an old friend of mine."

"*Is she!*" he said and planted himself in the middle of the deck and stretched out his arm. "Red light, ladies!"

Lora said, "Hannah! Hello, darling!"

Hannah stopped, a charming picture of Lady on Shipboard in her smart brown *tailleur*, pale blonde hair coiled smooth under her close little hat. "Oh, hello!" she said and her blue eyes brushed Lora's and lifted to Ollie Hard's. "*Hel-lo!* Aren't you energetic this morning?"

Lora dropped the hand she had held out to Hannah and managed to keep her smile in order. "So you two know each other?"

"Oh, our friendship dates from way back," Ollie said. "Let's see, was it the Statue of Liberty or the pilot ship?"

"I never can remember dates," Hannah said.

"Mother told me you were on board," Lora said. "Isn't it funny we should be crossing on the same ship?"

Now those blue eyes swung to her, cold under their raised brows. "Isn't it? You must have decided to sail rather suddenly, didn't you?"

"Yes, we—I—it *was* pretty sudden."

“It must have been. I happened to hear about it a couple of nights before we sailed when I ran into Judd Harcott.” She gave a little laugh. “He was absolutely tight—said he was out celebrating his freedom.”

She laughed as she said it and wagged her head as though deploring Judd’s gaucherie and Lora stood, one hand linked in the arm of her new friend, the other thrust deep in the pocket of her coat, her face turning from chalky white to crimson and back to chalky white again. But she tried to laugh to show that she enjoyed Hannah’s little joke too, and Hannah said, “Well, boys will be boys—come on, Mimi. Mother’s making signs,” and gave the dark girl’s arm a tug. “Be seeing you, Ollie!”

She had not planned to insult Lora for she was not, ordinarily, a malicious girl and she had always liked Lora well enough. But she had liked Judd better, secretly resented his affair with Lora, rejoiced at its failure and felt very sorry for Judd. And here was the cause of all his misfortune, walking the deck, gay as you please, with the most attractive man on shipboard; the man she had selected as her own special diversion as far back as the Statue of Liberty. Well, she had shown Lora that Judd wasn’t precisely pining for *his* lost love, either. And she hadn’t really lied—everything she had said was true enough. Judd *had* said he was celebrating his freedom—

Oliver Hard looked after the departing girls, then he glanced curiously down at Lora. Her slender arm was taut as steel under his, her face so pinched and sick that he was alarmed. "Look," he said, "there's a porpoise!" and drew her over to the rail. "No, I guess it wasn't a porpoise, after all." He leaned on the rail and, staring lazily at the sea, said, "Funny how few of those very fair blondes have loving dispositions. I was afraid it was a mistake for us to stop her. I rather suspected little Hannah was no friend of yours."

She held tight to the rail. "Did you?"

"Definitely," he said. He turned those merry, worldly eyes of his upon her and the color came rushing, hot and painful, into her cheeks. "But I wouldn't let it bother me, if I were you. Why should you care?"

"I don't," she said and realized the truth of that as she said it. Why should she care about Hannah, about anyone? Especially now that she didn't have to worry about Judd any more. Now that she knew he was taking it so sensibly, not just eating his heart out for her. It was absurd to eat your heart out for anyone. She made herself look at Ollie Hard, chin up, smiling. "I really *don't* care."

"That's better!" The wind had whipped her hair loose, bright curls feathered her hot cheeks and her eyes were luminous with defiance and pain. Ollie

Hard looked at her and thought of the things he had heard about her and was puzzled. She didn't look like a menace to him. She looked like a terribly sweet kid who had been badly hurt, so badly hurt that she couldn't conceal her wounds from the public view and that was a damned shame. He said, "Now, look here, this sort of thing happens to us all sometime or other. But we don't want to give people the satisfaction of letting 'em see it hurts, do we? Thing to do when you—er—meet a friend as *isn't* a friend, is keep your head up—put up a front. Let on you don't give a damn, see?"

She saw and for a moment she wished she could drop down dead there on the deck. But healthy girls of nineteen did not drop dead—of shame, or love either, even when there was no reason for them to keep on living. And, since you couldn't die or hide under the bedclothes the rest of your life, the only thing left for you to do was to put up a front. That was what her mother had been trying to tell her this morning. She nodded and said, "Yes, I see."

"Sure, you do!" He slid his hand under her arm. "How about finishing our walk?"

So Lora put up a front by walking three times round the deck on Mr. Hard's arm; walking three times past the chairs where Mrs. Vines and Hannah sat, and being much too animated and interested in her new friend to notice her old ones.

When she went down to the stateroom, she found Julia there freshening up for lunch. Julia said, "Well, I see you've made friends with that nice-looking boy Hay picked up."

Lora tossed her hat on the bed, shook out her curls. "Yes. Hay knows how to pick them, doesn't he?"

Her mother looked at her. "He seems very jolly and pleasant—you look better, dear. Much better."

"I feel grand. Ollie gave me a drink."

"Ollie! He gave you a drink?"

"Oh, this wasn't just an ordinary thirst quencher. This was medicinal. Just what I needed."

Julia had the sense that someone else had spoken. That smooth, toneless voice was so unlike Lora's. The face reflected above her own in the dressing table mirror as Lora reached for her brush, was not the stricken, lost-eyed, little girl face of that morning. The soft childish curves of cheek and chin and throat had hardened, the gray-green eyes looked out from between their long lashes a woman's eyes, veiled and inscrutable.

Julia did not comment on the change in her child though each day confirmed it more surely. Somehow Lora had found the courage, or that pride of which her parents had deplored the lack, to bear the burden of her loss and disgrace. She was assured and cheerful. If she noticed that the "nice girls"

aboard avoided her, she gave no sign and Ollie Hard saw to it that she did not lack for men, for partners at deck games and dancing.

There was relief in this for Julia. Her troubles were no longer complicated by worry for her daughter's health nor pity for her helpless despair. If she recognized that the rift between them was widening she was too wretched, too occupied in putting up a front herself, to bother overmuch about it. Mrs. Vines acknowledged the presence of her friend and neighbor of twenty summers only when they chanced to meet on deck or in the lounge—"Good morning, Mrs. Paris! Lovely day!" Julia knew that their story had not stopped with the Vines. She fancied every woman on board looked at her with the memory of those headlines in her eyes, seeing in her the mother of the girl who had been expelled from college for her scandalous conduct; seeing in her the wife of the "tailor." She longed for George, for her home and all the familiar, comfortable activities that had filled her life. But, most of all, she longed for a sight of that strange land where she hoped no telltale winds could follow her.

In this she was not alone. Hannah Vines was also looking restlessly toward her journey's end. She had never enjoyed a voyage less. She said so in her letters home, an unnecessary admission since the fact that she wrote at all was sufficient proof of her ennui.

She wrote her friends that the trip had been a ghastly bore. There was practically no one on board, not one attractive man. And, to an impulsive note to Judd Harcott, she added—"Lora Paris seems to be enjoying herself, though. She's generally completely surrounded by men."

Judd received that letter in a small, furnished room on the top floor of a shabby house in one of the less select quarters of New York's East Side. When he had left the Plaza, he had complied with the clerk's request for a forwarding address. He had regretted this ever since for Cliff Sidney had conscientiously readdressed the letters that had come to the university for his friend and these had followed Judd, a steady stream. Letters his too publicized affair with Earle had brought forth from an idle public—from ladies who thought he had been grossly ill used, from men who thought he had not been sufficiently ill used; from religious persons who wanted to reform him, from lonely girls who wanted to console him, from beggars, cranks, admirers—and friends.

Those letters from the men and women who had been his comrades and intimates were, perhaps, the hardest to bear. For in every protestation of their loyalty to him he read a condemnation of Lora and his heart shook with remorse and shame. He made

no attempt to answer them. That was part of his plan—to shake off the past, build a new future. This was what he had decided to do after Cliff left him that day. He had seen himself bereft of everything that made life worth the effort of living but going on alone and unfriended, “making good,” “showing them.”

This was the way Judd saw himself during those first days in New York for though he was lonely and bitter he was also young and healthy and the belief that time would justify him and restore Lora to him grew in his heart as a pearl grows in its shell. But he was not long in learning what other men had learned before him, that there is no past nor future, that the one is an integral part of the other. Judd’s past trailed him in those letters, hampered him in his search for work. In office after office, when he was lucky enough to force his way past the functionaries who guard the portals of the great, it bobbed up to block his way.

Pencil poised over paper, they dragged it out: Was he a college man? Well, yes—and no. What did he mean by that? Had he flunked out of college? Well—no. If he skirted those reefs successfully, there was the question of references. To whom could he refer them that was not a part of that past he had renounced? Names occurred to him, names that carried promise of kindness and indulgence but pride

and a growing sense of failure kept him from appealing to them.

With each day his self-confidence waned. He never left his room that he was not ridden by a very frenzy of fear that he would meet someone he knew. He found himself haunting the shabbier streets, stammering over his applications for work—any kind of work, now, in the shabbier employment agencies. He refused a clerkship in a man's haberdashery—Suppose someone he knew came in to buy a cravat—and the chance to drive the car of a man whose name was too familiar. But he accepted the job of shipping clerk in a large department store and kept it for two days. On the third morning he saw his fellow clerks whispering together, glancing over their shoulders at him, and walked out.

He knew it was absurd and cowardly but introspection had eaten his courage away. Introspection and loneliness—and poverty. When he had used up what cash he possessed, he had pawned his two suitcases. But a man couldn't live on two suitcases for long. He woke one morning to find that he was penniless and shabby and hungry. He had never sent for his trunks, he could not send for them now. If he sent for his trunks that would put Cliff on his trail. He couldn't have that happen. He knew he was not being very clever. There were ways for men to get money or to live without it. He had a couple of ways

in his pocket. One was a small, square diamond ring and the other was a narrow gold band.

He had been looking at those two rings on the morning that Hannah's note came. His room was cold and someone in the house was frying pancakes. He could smell them plainly but it did not bother him greatly. He was too hungry and he had just spent his last fifteen cents on a package of cigarettes. That was pretty damned silly, but even a poor bum had to have his smoke—he had read of things like that. In fact it seemed to him that he had read his own story dozens of times—Disintegration of a Gentleman—or—Gentleman into Bum, perhaps. He might, he thought, have been more original but tragedy never was original. After a man lost his self-respect, it didn't matter much what happened to his body.

Coming back after buying his cigarettes, he found Hannah's letter on the cluttered hall table. The words *S.S. Franconia* and the picture of the elegant ship made him smile. But he was not smiling when he had finished the letter that Hannah had written out of pique and boredom. He read it through three times and with each reading, some tension in him slacked. For Lora really was all right and that was what had been worrying him all these weeks, the fear that he had injured her beyond recovery and the fervent hope that one day he would be able to make amends. But now she was all right, her old

joyous, light-hearted self, "completely surrounded by men"—as why shouldn't she be? He was the last person she would ever need again and now there was no reason why he should bother about either the past or the future.

He tore the letter to shreds and tossed it in the battered tin scrap basket. He reached for a second cigarette but drew those two rings out of his pocket instead. He held them in the palm of his hand and looked at them, the little square diamond, the wedding ring that had never been worn. He ought to be able to hock the diamond for a fair sum—"I wouldn't put too much money in it, darling," his mother had said. "It would be bad taste for a girl still in school and we really can't afford—" He had put as much in it as he could scrape together and when he had mailed it, he had insured it for a good deal more than it was worth. Come to think of it, he'd never even seen that ring on Lora's hand. There had been plenty of time before college opened for him to take it to New York but his mother had persuaded him that they needed him at home and so he'd never seen Lora wearing her engagement ring.

He had seen her wearing the wedding ring, though. That day they had bought it. They had bribed the old jeweler to engrave it then and there and hung over him while he did it. Then, on their way back to the Harbor Village they had parked in a little

pine grove and Lora had tried on the ring. For a moment she actually had been a bride. She had looked at the ring on her hand and blushed and he had kissed first the ring and then her lips—and the air had been spicy with the scent of the pines and full of drowsy summer afternoon sounds. Then Lora had taken the ring off and pretended to be alarmed because, she said, she'd heard it was bad luck to try on the ring before the ceremony. He'd laughed at that! Bad luck indeed!

He dropped the rings in an inside pocket and got up. He'd pawn the diamond, the other one wouldn't bring enough to bother about. He had been sitting in his overcoat, now he picked up his hat and opened the door. The chambermaid was counting soiled towels in the hall and Judd said, "Hello, there! How's the girl?"

She looked up at him sharply. She was a thin, overworked sharp-eyed girl and long experience in secondrate rooming houses had taught her to be wary of cheerfulness. Cheerfulness meant either that a man was drunk or that he was planning to make his getaway. She had been warned to keep an eye on Judd for he had arrived with two suitcases and now he had none. Still he had paid his rent in advance only day before yesterday so maybe he had a right to be cheerful. "Mornin'," she said.

He shook his finger at her, "Someone," he said,

“is breaking the rules. Someone is cooking pancakes—an odor very offensive to my olfactory sense.”

She sat back on her heels and stared at him. He had never spoken to her before, she had never seen him smile before. He was smiling now, a broad grin that made deep creases in his thin, unshaven cheeks, and his eyes were full of a wild and reckless light. “You kidding me?” she said.

“I wouldn’t dream of taking such a liberty, my dear. I’m merely announcing my imminent departure. I really dislike the smell of pancakes intensely—other people’s pancakes, you understand.”

“You mean you’re leavin’?”

“That is the simplest way to put it.”

“Well,” she said defensively, “we don’t make no refunds here, you know. Too bad you didn’t make up your mind before you paid your rent.”

“Isn’t it?” Judd said, his grin widening. “Well, I guess I’m too used to having other folks make up my mind for me. Maybe that’s what ails me. Now what do you think of that—a great big boy like me?”

What she thought was that he was certainly a nut but she refrained from saying so and Judd went down the musty stairs and out into the gray November day. Or was it December? He was not sure about that, not sure about much of anything except that he was going away, which was what he had been longing to do from the first. He didn’t know where,

that wasn't important. Anywhere would do so long as it was far enough. If he went far enough and fast enough, he might even get away from himself.

The soiled old man in the dingy, cluttered pawnshop under the Elevated, looked with practiced indifference at the diamond. He was not, he said, interested in diamonds. Diamonds were a drug on the market. There were too many good imitations these days. Still, since Judd was his first customer and he was superstitious, he would advance him something on the ring as a very particular favor—

Judd lolling against the counter said, "Thanks a lot, Shylock!"

"Shylock iss not my name," the old man said mildly, reaching for his pencil and thinking that he was doing a very fair Park Avenue business these days, "it iss John. Vat is yours, pliss?"

Judd opened his mouth to speak, closed it on a thin smile. Then he said, "That's funny, mine's John, too—John—Harris."

Let the dead past bury its dead—and bury it deep.

Chapter 13

*J*ULIA WROTE TO HER HUSBAND FROM THE PENSION Berri in Paris—

“The place hasn’t changed much since we were here eleven years ago. Since I wrote you last, we’ve moved up to the three small rooms on the top floor so that it’s almost like having our own little apartment. My windows overlook the old Monastery gardens and I can see the monks walking about reading their prayer books. It’s very romantic. The weather here has been frightfully cold and foggy but we have open fires in every room and manage to keep warm.

“Hay started school last Monday. Naturally he doesn’t like it yet, it seems very strange and ‘foreign’ to him and they had to set him back two classes. But he’s being tutored in French and will soon catch up, I think. For his sake it might have been better to go to England. The climate couldn’t be much worse than it is here.

“You needn’t have worried about Lora. She has never shown any signs of fainting again, in fact she seems perfectly well and happy. She takes a French lesson every day and is studying art at a school on the Left Bank and doing very good work, especially with her sketching. To see her, you would think nothing unusual had happened, that we’d come abroad for pleas-

ure or to improve our minds. This is better than having her moping, I suppose, but it is incredible, isn't it?

"The man she met on shipboard—Oliver Hard, you remember I wrote you about him—stayed in Paris a few days before going south and took Lora around a good deal. He's the son of Franklin Hard of the Hard Manufacturing place upstate. He's a nice enough boy—good manners, well bred and all that, but a bit flippant—the typical playboy. He's in charge of the firm's plant over here in a place called Coureville. I think he and Lora are corresponding, but I'm not sure. I know she hasn't any young friends and I don't know how to arrange for her to meet any. Most of the people here at the Pension are English—a good many middle-aged and old ladies—not very friendly.

Be sure to eat your green salads and drink your fruit juice every day, dear. And tell the girls not to forget to water my flowers. When you come over in May, I think it would be nice to go south for a while. It's so cold here—"

Cold and sunless and bleak was Paris in January. Cold and lonely for a middle-class, middle-aged woman in exile, longing for her home and her man and the life she had lived for more than forty years. Trying to be contented, trying not to worry, trying not to *think*! And, in a Paris pension, with no house to run, no social obligations to fulfill, no holiday parties to plan for the children, no kindred souls to gossip with over a cup of tea—you had so much time to think. You couldn't knit all the time, you

couldn't just sit from morning to night in your room even though it overlooked a romantic monastery and the chimney pots of the most beautiful city in the world. And if you ventured into the Louis-something salon, you were confronted with alien faces, raised alien eyebrows that seemed to ask what in the world you were doing over here in a strange land when you ought to be home watering your flowers and seeing to it that your poor husband got his green salad and fruit juice.

Or so it seemed to Julia. It had not seemed like this eleven years ago when she and George had run away for a second honeymoon. Then the days had not been long enough, every face had been a friendly face and adventure waited around every corner. But the consciousness of why she was there was so strong in her that she fancied it visible to every eye. "She's the woman who—" "That's the girl who—" You could *say* that you considered a year abroad a better finishing school for a girl than any college. But what could you say that would explain why a half-grown American boy should not be preparing for his future in his own country?

Julia sealed and addressed her letter with a sigh and the fervent hope that George would not read between the lines. It was cold in the room and she put another briquette on the fire and thought as she did so what ridiculous things they were, silly

little blocks of powdered coal. But the fireplace was ridiculous, too, with its prim little grate and meager blaze. She thought of her own fireplace at home, of the crackling logs and hearty flames. She was forever thinking things like this, comparing, resenting, hating. It was growing to be an obsession. Hating foreign ways and foreign food, the foreign signs that met her eyes when she went out, the foreign sounds that assailed her ears. She was sick for home!

Hay came in at five, his books under his arm, his cheeks and eyes bright with cold, his mouth sulky. Julia said gaily, "Hello, darling! Cold?"

"Naw!" He threw his books on one chair, his hat on another, his coat on a third. "I'm hungry. Anything to eat?"

"I bought some fruit this morning and there are some of those little pastry things left. Only don't spoil your appetite for dinner."

Hay inspected the fruit on the table, picked up one of the little pastry things. "Heck, I'm sick of pastry. Don't they ever make cake over here? I mean, regular *cake* like we have home?"

"If foreign countries were like home there wouldn't be any point in traveling, darling," his mother said. "How did school go today?"

"Oh, all right." He dug his hands into his pockets and glared into the fire. "Only the *directeur* said he thought maybe I'd be better off in a lower

class. He said he was afraid I didn't understand some of the subjects well enough to—heck! How can I understand 'em when I don't know what they're saying half the time!"

"Well, you will soon, dear. You're getting along so well with your French."

"I *am* not! Whenever I say anything the kids all snicker. They're always looking at me like I was a freak or something and when we go out for recess they stand around and make fun of me and I can't even tell 'em where to get off because I don't know how to say it in French. Listen, it's a heck of a school anyway—you oughta see 'em trying to play what they call football! You'd laugh your head off—and they don't have hardly any athletics at all. Honest you oughta see the gym—" His voice choked off on the memory of another gym, another school. The memory of a football field at "old Pepper's," of the flying ball and shouting boys and trees gold and red in the frosty sun; of the smell of burning leaves and roasting apples under a yellow harvest moon and jumbled dreams of touchdowns and boxes from home. "And there's nothing to do *after* school. I mean, I don't know any fellas—"

Julia got up quickly, her hand pressed hard against her throat. She went to Hay and gave his head a brisk little pat. "Someday you'll be terribly glad you've had this experience, darling. I know it's

hard right now, but that's only because it's so strange and new—"

"Why don't you take him home, mother?" Lora said from the doorway.

Her mother turned sharply. "I didn't hear you come in."

"I came in half an hour ago. I've been in my room studying. I couldn't help hearing Hay. Why don't you take him home and leave me here? I'd be perfectly all right."

"Perfectly all right! A girl of your age alone in a strange city—a strange country?"

"But I really like it and I'd be perfectly safe. And it is rough on Hay. He really should be home—and in his own school."

"Isn't it a little late for you to think of that now!" Julia said, her hand at her throat again pressing back the accusations that filled it like a bitter torrent, not knowing that they were all there in her tortured eyes for Lora to read. "Don't talk nonsense!"

Lora looked away, said in a low voice, "I didn't think it was nonsense. You wouldn't have to stay if it weren't for me. That's why—"

"You know I wouldn't dream of leaving you here alone! I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing!"

Lora turned and went back to her own room. Her heart did not beat much faster for that scene.

She had hoped, just for a moment, that Hay's pathetic outburst might triumph over her mother's sense of duty, that she would take him home. It would have made it so much easier for them all—for Julia especially. Lora had thought for a long time, that it must be hard for a mother to be cooped up like this with the child who had made a lonely exile of her. With this thought always in mind, she kept out of her mother's sight as much as she could manage; spent hours studying in her room, lingered long over her art lessons, sat by the hour in the parks watching the children at play, took Hay sightseeing whenever he was free to go.

She had done all this without thinking or feeling too deeply about it. She saw herself as serving a sentence for her crime and was resolved to serve it as patiently as possible. But this widening rift between her and her mother was complicating things badly. And she was helpless to make things better.

She did not mind greatly for herself. The indifference she had assumed under Oliver Hard's tuition came more naturally to her now. It extended even to Judd. At first when she had thought of him—back at college, flying around in his old roadster, dancing, laughing, free once more—she had known a warm thrill of satisfaction. Judd, at least, was all right. A man could live down his youthful indiscretions, forget his youthful passions. He would

take his degree in June and life would lie before him, new and exciting and full of promise. But as the days passed, she thought of him less and less.

She thought of him today, though, coming from that scene with her mother and for the first time, the thought was tainted with resentment. Judd was all right—and she was glad, of course—still, he had lost nothing by that experience save an illusion or two, perhaps. She had lost everything, even her mother's love. It wasn't fair—ah, it wasn't fair!

A few days after Hay's outburst, Lora left the little studio on the Rue St. Jacques early. It was a half-holiday for Hay and she thought she would take him somewhere, to that quaint musée, perhaps, with the realistic wax figures and trick mirrors—more like a Mrs. Jarley's waxworks than a musée, really. Hay loathed museums but he was sure to like this one.

She walked briskly across the cobbled courtyard. She was wearing the blue suit with the near-sables that her mother had feared was too "grown up" for her when they bought it last Spring. Lora had caught up with it in the intervening months. Because she was thinner she appeared taller, her thick curls had been thinned out and "set," she wore her small, brimmed hat in the French manner—straight on her head and drawn a little over her eyes.

As she opened the heavy grilled gate she saw a tall young man leaning against the stone pilaster smiling

at her and it was a moment before she recognized Ollie Hard. She stopped short, staring. "Ollie! I thought you were in Coureville!"

"Until ten last night you were justified in thinking so," he said and took her hand and grinned down at her. "That was the hour I boarded the *Rapide* at Marseilles. Arriving in Paris at dawn, I appeased my hunger at a convenient tavern, performed my ablutions and hied me forth to the Pension Berri only to be informed by a buxom wench that you had succumbed to the lure of the brush and palette—fancy my chagrin!"

She laughed. "All proper young ladies must learn to draw and speak foreign languages—"

"And play the pianoforte," he said. "Ghastly thought. Darling, you're almost as beautiful as I remembered you. How about a cup of *chocolat* at the Cafe Deux Magots?"

It had been like this with them ever since that meeting on the ship. This merry worldling had dispensed with all the preliminaries. Now they might have known each other from their bread and milk days. "Chocolate at the Deux Magots sounds lovely," she said.

He tucked her hand under his arm and they started down the noisy, crowded Rue St. Jacques. "You're not, by any chance, glad to see me, I suppose?"

"I suppose I am."

"I kind of thought you would be," he said. "That last letter of yours—well, it lacked the customary hey nonny, nonny ring."

Mats had been spread on the pavements outside the famous old café, the braziers were glowing. Students from the nearby ateliers—men in berets and hatless girls—were nibbling brioche and sipping *chocolat* at the little tables. Men and women in search of more spiritual refreshment, filed in and out of the open doors of the ancient Church of St. Germain de Près across the way. A dirty, cheerful old chestnut vender cackled the excellence of her wares—"Marrons, chaud très chaud!" to the passersby.

A waiter recognizing these two as Americans and sensing a generous tip, led them to a table beside a brazier and Ollie said, "*Deux chocolat*—and a couple of *brioche*, garçon." Then he said to Lora, "You look utterly lovely but different—what have you been doing to yourself, *ma chérie*?"

"I adore your French," she said.

"And I adore your eyes. But you didn't answer my question."

"It's probably my hair—I had pounds thinned out." She leaned on her elbows and smiled at him. "Now, tell me all about it? How's business and how's Coureville?"

He wagged his head and rolled his eyes. "Try-

ing to sell electric iceboxes to people who have worried along nicely with window boxes for a thousand years isn't a business. It's a major operation. And Coureville—oo-la-la and lackaday! Coureville, little one, is not a town, it's a tradition. Would you believe that in Coureville the peasantry still goes shod in sabots and believes the radio is black magic? In Coureville oxen draw the primitive plough and the names of Irving Berlin and Mae West were never heard in the land. The belle of the village has no ankles and a moustache and the nearest nightclub is in Marseilles twenty kilometers distant!"

"I thought you looked more rested," Lora said.

"Rested, my child, is not the word. Atrophied, if you like—fossilized—mummified—"

"Poor Ollie!"

He reached for her hand and squeezed it hard. "That's better. Just what I needed. Now, tell me about you—and the kid and your mother. How are they? Enjoying gay Paree?"

"Y-yes. I'm afraid they get a little homesick sometimes. My father and mother have never been separated before. Mother gets pretty lonely."

"Don't I know what *that* is! And how about yourself? Found any nice playmates?"

She looked away. "No, I haven't met— I didn't come to Paris to play."

"If anybody hears you say that, the franc'll go off

ten points," he said. "Well, what do you do when you're not pursuing the arts and generally improving your mind?"

She said restively, "Oh, I—I don't know. I manage to keep busy."

"So do I," he said, "but it takes a lot of doing sometimes. You and I ought to get together, darling. Now, there's an idea. Why not come to Coureville and study the morals and manners of the native and, incidentally, cheer my lonely exile?"

"That *is* an idea!" She tried to say it lightly, but she detected a new note in his voice, read new excitement in his eyes. "I'll have to think about that."

"I have been thinking about it the last couple of days," he said. "I had a hunch you were kind of rattling around up here in the big city and I honestly think you'd like Coureville. It's a romantic spot, you know—historical ruins and ghosts. Roman bastions and what have you. Why not marry me and come along down?"

She caught her upper lip between her teeth and the color drained slowly out of her face. "You'd better not ask me, Ollie. I might surprise you and take you up."

"It wouldn't surprise me at all. I'd think it was very sensible of you. Here you are mooning around Paris with nobody to play with and there I am in the same fix. So why not get together? Why not pool

our miseries, as it were?" He lowered his voice, said close to her ear, "The best way to get over one man is to acquire another, darling."

She lifted startled eyes and the color came rushing back into her cheeks. "So you know about that, do you?"

"I hope you won't mind too much," he said, "but I do. I know the *real* story. Hay told me. I think he rather hoped something might come of it and he wanted me to have my facts straight."

She faced him squarely. "You must have been amused!"

"I was. When I first heard it, I couldn't believe it. I thought your little brother had been reading a book."

"One of those sloppy, old-fashioned love stories," she said.

"Yup. I couldn't believe that any girl in this enlightened age could be so—well—"

"Idiotic," she said.

"Quixotic is a nicer word, darling. Now, I wouldn't mind a quixotic wife at all."

She said, slowly crumbling a piece of brioche between her fingers, "Your offer tempts me, Ollie. But, if I should accept it, I'd only be doing it to escape."

"I realize that and it's okay with me," he said cheerfully. "Plenty of people have married for less commendable reasons."

"Some people," she said, "marry for love."

He gave an energetic nod. "Which is all right, too, if they have the other things that go with it. But I doubt if it's as essential as the other things."

"What other things?"

"Well, if they need each other, if each has something the other requires. That, you know, is the foundation of every successful partnership." She moved her head in slow agreement. It was true. She and Judd had not really needed each other. They had wanted each other and they had had love, but they had not had the "other things" essential to a successful partnership. "Now, you and I," Ollie Hard said, "need each other. I need a companion in my exile, you need to escape, as you express it. I'm of age, solvent, of a temperate and sunny disposition. I have a hunch we'd get along fine and what more could any couple ask? If we didn't, there's always the divorce court and no hard feelings."

She said quietly, "You're being very frank and generous with me, Ollie, so I'll be frank with you, too. I like you a lot, but I don't want to marry you—I don't want to marry anybody, but I would like to make it possible for my mother and brother to go back home. They're only staying over here on my account and they both hate it—and it's terribly hard on my father, too." Her hands were quiet in her lap, now, her eyes fixed, steady and grave, on his. "I've thought and thought—in novels girls in a posi-

tion like mine, would run away and get a job—”

“And marry the rich boss,” he said.

“Yes. But there’s nothing I can do—I never finished college and I haven’t any talent—except for drawing pictures! Besides I couldn’t do anything like that—like running away. That would only make things look worse. But if I married—”

“Marriage would resolve all your difficulties, darling. It’s the perfect solution.”

She looked at him. His mouth was smiling but its merry skepticism was a little forced and his worldly dark eyes were excited and hopeful. She said, “Did you come to Paris especially to rescue me, Ollie?”

“Yeah, but I had an ulterior motive so don’t order up any haloes. You’ve been on my mind for weeks. I kind of guessed how things would be for you up here because once people get themselves in a mess like this, well it’s kind of like falling into a swamp. The harder you try to get out the more messed up you get—”

“Yes,” she said eagerly. “That’s it! I’ve tried and tried—”

“And, you see, I happen to want to marry you very much, darling,” he said.

Julia was in her room when Lora brought Ollie Hard to her. She had been waiting for Hay and Lora and the gong for *déjeuner* and at first glance she

did not recognize the tall young man with her daughter. There was an unfinished sweater in her lap and knitting needles in her hand but she had been gazing out of the window at the few thin rays of sunlight on the garden wall and her eyes were a little blinded by that unusual light so that for a moment she thought Ollie was Judd Harcott. Then he came toward her and she recognized him. She was not very glad to see him. She did not dislike him but she had sensed from the first that he *did* dislike her. She tried to make her voice sound cordial. "How do you do, Mr. Hard!"

Ollie said, "How are you?" and asked if he might sit down and drew a chair closer to hers. Then he said in that pleasant, half-mocking way of his, "I'm afraid this is going to surprise you a little, Mrs. Paris, but I've come to ask you if you've any objection to my marrying Lora. I've just asked her to be my wife and I'm happy to say she has consented—"

He stopped there to pick up the sweater and yarn that had dropped from Julia's lap as she stood up. She stood there rigid, her eyes on Lora who was sitting in the center of a small brocaded *divan*. She stood looking at her child as though she had never seen her before, as though she had suddenly discovered something so incredible, so monstrous, that she couldn't believe in it. "Marry her! Lora has *consented to marry you!*"

Ollie said imperturbably, "We hoped you would approve—"

"Approve!" Julia said, whirling on him, her hands fisted hard against her breast. "You hoped I would approve!"

"Naturally, you will want to know that I'm in a position to support a wife," he said, with just a trace of irony. "I can assure you that I am. As to my character, family position, antecedents and all that, I think I can show you—"

"Lora! Is—is this a joke?"

"Goodness, no!" Lora said and sprang up and came across the room and stood beside Ollie Hard. "It isn't a joke at all! It's perfectly serious. Don't you see, we—"

"You want to marry this man! You *could* marry him—"

"Ollie's fine—and I *want* to marry him," Lora said, her voice a little high but quite steady. "If you're worrying about that other affair, he knows all about it and doesn't mind at all. He knows it wasn't serious—that it was only a boy and girl affair—just as you always said it was—"

Julia stepped back from her. "Only a—a boy and girl affair!"

"Yes. And this isn't like that, Mother. This is perfectly sensible and businesslike. We know what we're doing."

Without taking his eyes off Julia, Ollie reached out and drew Lora close to his side. He said, "We hoped you'd be glad about this, Mrs. Paris. We hoped you'd give us your consent and your blessing—"

"But you don't insist on it," Julia said. "That's what you mean, isn't it? You'd marry her without it—a girl you scarcely know—"

"I'm sorry to contradict, but I think I know Lora very well. Better perhaps than some people who have known her longer!"

"—you would marry her, knowing we're alone over here—knowing her father is three thousand miles away—"

"Isn't that all the more reason why she should have a husband to look after her?"

"I don't think dad will mind, mother," Lora said. "Of course, it would be fine if he could be here but we want to be married at once. Ollie's all alone in Coureville—he has a darling old house with a walled garden and fig trees—think of it in January! But it's lonely for him and he needs me. We're not going to have a real wedding—I won't need any trousseau—we're just going to be married by the registrar or whatever you call him—"

"You are!" Julia said. "You've decided all that, have you? You've made all your plans?"

"Yes," Lora said, "we've made all our plans."

That night last autumn when she had put on her

grown-up suit and near-sables to go and meet Judd, she had had a delicious fear that he might not recognize her in her city clothes. It was a groundless fear for the girl in the city clothes was still the girl he had met on the beach hugging the beach ball in the curve of her slender waist, a merry, sun-bronzed girl smiling at him from under lashes that curled up and back like a child's. Judd would still have recognized her that night at the Plaza, but it is doubtful if he would have done so now. Even her mother's eyes searched in vain for some sign of that rosy, buoyant girl, trying to penetrate the protective front Lora had built up—but it was like shooting at a stone wall with one of those rubber-tipped arrows Hay used to play with.

Julia could have screamed with the futility of her own despair. She said, her eyes moving helplessly between them, "I don't know—what to say! Lora, I don't think you realize—you *can't* realize what you're doing! I think you should wait—for a little while, anyway—think this over—"

"What is there to wait for?" Lora said and smiled a little. "No, I'm going through with it—this time."

Chapter 14

LORA SAT ON A BENCH IN THAT PRIMMEST OF Paris parks, the prim little Parc Monceau. For a change the sun was bright and quite warm, the rolled lawns green as Spring. Bare-legged children disported themselves on the pebbled walks with that grave gaiety characteristic of the well-bred French child. Uniformed nursemaids divided their attention between their charges and their embroidery. A smocked gardener knelt to his work among the shrubs and now and then someone would stop and watch him with that earnest concentration of the idler.

Lora sat with her hands in her lap. Ollie was off somewhere making inquiries necessary to the marriage ceremony, sending telegrams and cables, greasing, as he expressed it, the marital wheels. Lora had gone over to the Rue St. Jacques for her portfolio. There had been no hurry about that but she had made a great point of it, wanting to get away from the pension, not wanting to be alone with her mother. They had been alone for the few moments after Ollie left and before Hay came in from school and

Julia had tried to say some of the things she felt she must say. But when she tried to say them, they sounded so false and inconsistent to her that she stopped from sheer confusion. She had been horrified by Lora's incredible, cold-blooded inconstancy, yet how could she accuse her of inconstancy after having exhorted her to forget Judd? She could not protest on the ground of Ollie's youth or insolvency. He was twenty-seven, a good deal better than solvent and he had assured Julia that his parents would be "tickled to death that he'd settled down," and that they would be "crazy about Lora."

Julia had found herself floundering helplessly while Lora listened, polite and impassive. Julia had stammered finally, "What will your father think?"

"He'll probably think he's pretty lucky to get me off his hands," Lora had said.

Now Lora sat in the Parc, her hands quiet in her lap, her heart almost as quiet in her breast. A lovely lethargy overlay her emotions. She could look at the little French children rolling their hoops or sedately skipping rope and think of nothing but little French children rolling hoops and sedately skipping rope. Presently she must go back to the pension for Ollie was coming to take her to dinner. They were going to Foyot's and he would tell her about things—what they had to do about the license, when they could

be married. She supposed she should be thinking about clothes, but she had little money of her own and hated to ask her mother for more. Besides there was no time and she had plenty of clothes.

The smocked gardener working around the shrubs had quite an audience now. Some children were watching him, and a rather plump man in gray. He leaned back on his cane and stared down at the gardener's deft manipulation of his trowel. Lora looked at him and frowned a little, thinking there was something vaguely familiar about him. Then a child in a nearby pram cried and she turned to look at it and forgot him.

He had walked past her once and turned and was passing her again when she looked up and recognized Mr. Harcott. He continued a few steps down the walk, turned and came back and stood directly in front of her, his hat in his hand. He said, "Why, er—how do you do! I—er—I thought I recognized you."

The last time she had seen him was that day in the Old Harbor church and for just a second she felt again as she had felt then, terribly young and frightened and guilty. But that lasted only a second. There was nothing to be afraid of now, nothing to feel guilty about—she had given him back his boy, hadn't she? She said coldly, "How do you do!"

"This is a charming spot, isn't it?" he said. "May

I sit down here?—a lovely day for a wonder, too. I—er—I’d no idea you were in Paris. Have you been here long?”

“Oh, yes. We’ve been here for some weeks.”

“Is that so? Well, well—” His cane was propped between his knees, he began to poke a little hole in the gravel with its ferrule and Lora saw that his hand was shaking, the cane shaking. She had not remembered him as an old man and was surprised to find him so now. Surprised but not at all moved, either by his infirmities or his friendly advances. She reached for the folio on the bench beside her and he said, “Is your—er—husband here—in Paris—with you?”

Her eyes spread. “My husband?”

“I—didn’t I understand you to say that he was with you?”

“I have no husband,” she said. “I am here with my mother and brother.”

She stood up to go, was amazed to find that shaking hand on her arm. “And Judd? Where is he?”

She was too astonished for a moment to answer. Then she repeated, frowning, shaking her head slowly, “Where is Judd?”

His fingers tightened on her arm. “You heard me, didn’t you? I asked you a civil question, you might be good enough to answer it civilly.”

She sat down on the bench again, partly because

one or two of the nursemaids were staring, partly because she felt too shaky to stand. But he should not, she thought hotly, frighten her again. "I don't see why I should answer it at all, Mr. Harcott—I don't see why you should ask me such a question. You must know that *I* don't know anything—about Judd—any more."

"You don't know anything—you—you mean you've broken with him?"

"You must have known that long ago."

"If I had known, would I have asked you! So that's it! You threw him over! When you found he would have nothing, after all, you threw him over!"

His shaking voice stopped, his shaking hand went to his eyes and Lora stared at him, puzzled and indignant. "You're not being very civil now, Mr. Harcott. I broke with Judd because there was nothing else to do. I knew you would never forgive him if he married me—my parents felt the same way. I knew it wasn't any use—"

"Well, where *is* he? Where is he now, then?"

"Where is he? He's in college, isn't he? Don't you know that?" She whirled around on the bench. "Don't *you* know? Isn't he in college? Cliff told me they were going to let him finish—that everything was going to be all right again for him. Wasn't it? *Didn't* they take him back?"

The savage red went slowly out of his face leaving

it flaccid and gray. He looked at her helplessly. "We seem to be talking in circles—can it be possible you didn't know? Didn't he tell you that they agreed to reinstate him only on condition that he broke off his engagement to you—"

"But he did—I did! I broke it!"

—"and that he refused? That he gave up his degree—his career—his own parents—"

"Oh, no! No!"

"He never told you—"

"How could he? I never saw him again—I never knew anything like this could happen!" It didn't matter now that half the proper nursemaids in the Parc were gazing with fascinated horror at that scene on the bench; at the fierce old man and burning-eyed girl shouting imprecations at each other. "If I had known, do you think I'd have let him go so easily? Never! And I'd have *made* them take him back—that's what you should have done! And all this time I thought everything was all right with him! Why didn't you let me know? I'd have told you he was free." She grabbed his sleeve and shook his arm. "Where is he now? What happened to him?"

"I thought you were in a better position to answer that question than I. I haven't seen him—heard from him—since that night he left his mother and me to keep his rendezvous with you. The night he was released—"

“I never met him at all!” Lora said, her face white as the white pebbles at her feet. “I never saw him—I thought it was no use. He may be dead—anything may have happened to him! Oh, how dared you do such a thing to him? I never would have done it! I never would have hurt him like that!” The tears were pouring down her cheeks, she doubled her fists and shook them against his breast. “I loved him—more than you did! I loved him more than I loved my pride—more than I loved anything. But you didn’t or you’d never have let him go! You’re a terrible old man! You’re a beast—and you’ve spoiled everything—”

The nursemaids, the gardener, the gaping children, saw the pretty American girl leap to her feet and go running blindly across the lawns of the primest park in Paris. One of the nursemaids saw the tears streaming down her cheeks, the gardener plainly heard her sobs. They turned and glared balefully at the old gentleman still sitting on the bench, his hands grasping his stick, his eyes on the ground. An evil old man, they thought, one of those rich, greedy old Americans with too much gold in his pocket and too much time on his hands.

The French are an impulsive and sentimental people. It is not at all unlikely that if the gardener or one of the more masterful nursemaids had made a move to avenge the insult to the pretty, weeping

young lady, Bailey Harcott would have been mobbed. But no one made that move and, after a little he got, rather laboriously, to his feet. Then he noticed Lora's portfolio on the bench. He stared down at it for a little then he picked it up and tucked it under his arm and walked slowly out.

Julia was trying to write her husband about Lora's approaching marriage. She had begun, "I don't know how to tell you—" a dozen times, for it was true. She didn't know how to tell George that his daughter who, a few short weeks before, had sacrificed herself, her family—everything for Judd Harcott, was now blithely planning to marry Ollie Hard. She had sent Hay out and he was now gloomily bouncing a ball against the garden wall to the annoyance of several old ladies playing backgammon in the Louis-something salon and making unflattering remarks about the manners of American children in general and Hay in particular.

Julia wrote—

"There is absolutely nothing I can do to prevent it. You would realize that if you could see Lora—see how she has changed. You remember how open and frank she always was—"

(She had been frank enough about Judd that August night, "I love him, Mother. If I thought I could ever love another man the way I love Judd,

I'd rather die." And now she was marrying Ollie Hard!)

"—but for the past months she has been like a stranger. I've never known what she was thinking—"

(Perhaps I should have tried to find out. Perhaps I've been like a stranger to her.)

"—and I've been so concerned about Hay and you—I didn't realize this affair was serious at all. How could I? I never dreamed that a girl who had been brought up to regard marriage as sacred, who'd been reared in the atmosphere of a happy marriage—"

(We always have been so happy, haven't we, my darling? Until this happened! Perhaps it would have been better if we'd never had children, and yet you remember how we wanted them! You remember what a precious baby Lora was—even when she first came? Those darling curls and her funny little nose? Who would ever have thought then that she would live to make us so wretched! Oh, it isn't fair, it isn't *fair*!)

"—but of course this may work out all right. It isn't as though there was anything wrong about Ollie. He isn't a man I could ever be really fond of and of course I can never forgive his rushing Lora into this—I can't believe she's in love with him—but young people take everything so lightly these days, even love and marriage—"

(Lora took it seriously enough before. How furious and offended she was when *I* treated it lightly. Perhaps that was a mistake, but what else could I have done! With the Harcotts telling us almost in so many words that she wasn't good enough for Judd! If it hadn't been for that I never would have joked her about it—I would have been glad, really. Glad that love had come to her so early and so surely, before she had messed around with other boys the way so many girls do these days. After all, I was in love with George when I was eighteen—married when I was nineteen. Well, Lora's nineteen now, old enough to be married, but how can she do it like this? How can she marry this man when she and Judd—")

Julia laid down her pen, dropped her prematurely white head on the desk. She prayed, "Oh, God, dear God!" but He was even farther away than George today, she could not reach Him. She raised her head suddenly, straightened her hair, for someone was coming. She heard feet running, light and swift, up the stairs, heard a door bang, Lora's door. She sat listening, her eyes narrow, mouth grim and bitter. It had been a long time since Lora had come bounding up the stairs like that, a long time since she had done anything so young and buoyant! Well, she was going to be married and no doubt she was happy!

She picked up her pen again and laid it down, went to her own door and opened it. For a moment she stood outside Lora's door listening to those dreadful muffled sounds, then she went in. Lora lay across the bed, her head buried in the pillow, her slender body writhing. Julia touched her shoulder, "Lora! What's the matter?"

Lora sat up. Her hair was a snarled tumble, her eyes red and wild. She said, "They kicked him out! They ruined his life too! He didn't go back to college at all—he isn't going to get his degree—they kicked him out! And all this time, I've been thinking he was all right! That's all the good it did us—he gave up everything for me—and then I wasn't there! I was all he had left—and I wasn't there!"

"What are you talking about! Control yourself—people will hear you—"

"Let them hear me! They're beasts—both of them! I told him so—"

"Who—who did you tell what?"

"His father—Judd's father. And so is his mother—a beast! They don't even know what happened to him—they turned him out—he may be dead for all they know!"

Julia said sharply, "Be quiet!" and sat down on the bed. "Now, tell me quietly what happened—what you're talking about."

The story came in incoherent gusts, now savage

and shrill, now thick with sobs. Julia listened, nearly as shocked as Lora had been, almost as angry. She said, over and over, "How could they? Poor boy—poor Judd! And they never knew—"

"He never went back—they don't even know what became of him. They thought he'd married me—"

"Yes! That's what they *would* think—that we'd have no more pride—"

"Oh, *pride!* Who cares about pride? If I'd known—if I'd only *known*—" She broke again, crumpled up on the bed.

Julia said mechanically. "Don't cry any more. You'll make yourself sick," and stood up, drew her hand across her forehead. She said suddenly, "It's too bad—terribly unfortunate, the whole thing—but I don't see why you should be so upset about it now. You're going to marry another man in a couple of days. Had you forgotten that?"

Lora went still, sat up slowly, wiped her eyes and nose with a sodden handkerchief. "Yes, I—I guess I did forget—just for a minute."

"If you care so much about Judd, why are you going to marry Ollie Hard!"

Lora looked down at the sodden handkerchief; she said, low and bitter, "Why do you care what I'm going to marry him for—as long as I *do* marry him—as long as *you* don't have to worry about me any more?"

Julia went livid, she did what she had never done in her life before—lifted her hand and struck Lora full in the face. She cried, “Don’t you dare talk to me like that! Don’t you ever *dare* speak to your mother like that!”

Lora’s hand flew to her face, she looked up at her mother with her mouth sagging open, her wet eyes wide—astounded, hurt little-girl eyes. “I— Oh, I didn’t mean— Oh, *mummy*, how could you!”

How could she! Julia was trembling so she could hardly stand, but that was purely external. That slap had released some choked-up spring in her, the poison of atrabilious brooding went washing away on its wholesome flood. She said strongly, “Because you needed it!” And sat down on the bed again, panting a little. “So that’s why you were marrying him?”

“I thought you’d be glad—to be rid of me. I didn’t blame you—”

“Ah, Lora, Lora! How could you think such a thing, my darling?” With a convulsive sob Lora’s head went down on her mother’s breast and Julia gathered her child in, held her fierce and close, kissed the hot, wet cheek. “Did you forget that I’m your mother, dear—” (Had *she* almost forgotten it?) “—and that I love you, more than all the world! How could you think it would make me happy to see you unhappy!”

“Oh, mummy, mummy!”

“Yes, sweet.” She rocked the slender body gently back and forth. “Yes, dear—it’s all right, now. Don’t cry any more. Everything’s going to be all right.”

They were still sitting there like this when Hay came galloping up the stairs and burst into the room. “Listen, mom—”

“Go away, dear. Sis and I are busy. Go out in the garden—”

“Aw,—there’s nothing to do out there—”

“Go out and play with your ball.”

“They don’t want me to. Those old women don’t want me to play ball. They say it disturbs them.”

She snapped, “Well, let it! We pay the same board here they do and you’ve as much right to play ball as they have to play backgammon. You go straight down there and play all you like!”

When he had gone, looking a little scared, she thought, “Now *what* a way to talk! What a *common* way to talk! First I slap my child’s face and then I talk like that—maybe we’re just as common as the Harcotts said we were—but at least we don’t drive our own children out—” her arms tightened around Lora. No, she hadn’t driven her child out, but she had almost done worse. She had almost driven *her* child into a loveless marriage. She said briskly, “Come now, brace up, sweet. We’ve got things to do. First of all you’re going to tell that man you’re

not going to marry him—what's that? No, you sit still. I'll see who it is."

But she needed Lora, after all, for the little *femme de chambre* was at the door. The *femme de chambre* knew no more English than Julia knew French and Lora had to be called upon to translate. Julia, watching her face, saw it turn so white that the marks of that slap stood out on her cheek in faint red welts.

"What is it? What does she want?"

"She says there's a man downstairs—asking for you. It's Mr. Harcott!"

"Harcott!" Julia said. "Downstairs—well, tell her to have him come up to my room. I can't see him downstairs—with all those women listening. Ask her to bring him up—" she began to smooth her hair at Lora's bureau. "You don't have to see him at all—You stay right here."

Lora closed the door on the *femme de chambre* and went across to her mother. "What do you suppose he wants, mum? What—are you going to say to him?"

"Plenty!" Julia said. "And thank goodness I don't have to say it in French."

Mr. Harcott was a little out of breath when he had climbed the three flights of stairs, but he adhered strictly to the gentlemanly pretext that he was making a social call on a lady with whom he had always

been on friendly—if formal—terms. He said, “How do you do, Mrs. Paris? It’s nice to see you again but you know the old saying—one can always count on meeting one’s friends in Paris!”

Julia shook hands with him briefly, turned on the light for the dusk was falling. “Sit down, Mr. Harcott.”

“Your daughter—perhaps she told you that we met in the Park this afternoon—left her portfolio on the bench where we had been sitting. Fortunately the address was on it—”

“Thank you for returning it,” Julia said. “Yes, Lora told me about meeting you. I’m glad you’ve come. If you hadn’t, I was going to hunt you up—”

“That would have been—er—very nice. My wife and I are stopping at the Crillon. My wife, I am sorry to say, has not been in the—er—best of health. In fact, at the moment, she is confined to her bed.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Julia said, “but not surprised—after what Lora told me about this afternoon.”

“Ah—yes. So she told you.” His eyes moved this way and that about the room and his hands opened and closed on the handle of his stick. With his sagging shoulders and sagging cheeks, his assumption of dignity seemed to Julia pathetic and ridiculous. “This whole affair—it has been most unfortunate. When I saw your daughter this afternoon, I thought

naturally she would know—that is, we had every reason to believe that the young people would have married. You may imagine how astonished I was when I heard—”

“No more astonished than we were to learn what you had done to Judd,” Julia said quietly.

He stiffened. “We could hardly have known that things would work out this way. Even if we had—it would not have altered the fact that Judd had defied us at every turn, opposed all our efforts to help him live down his—er—mistakes. He made his choice with his eyes open—”

“Choice!” Julia said. “It’s a bad policy to place young people in a position where they must make a choice, Mr. Harcott.”

“In this case,” he said sternly, “*we* had no choice but to act as we did. To have him inform us—scarcely an hour after his release from jail—after what his mother and I had suffered on his account—that he was going on with this affair that had brought him—that had brought us all—nothing but unhappiness—”

“That wasn’t his fault or Lora’s,” Julia said, hands tight clasped in her lap, youthful blue eyes wide and bright. “It was ours—yours and mine and your wife’s. If we hadn’t been more concerned with our own petty personal animosities, than with them, it needn’t have brought us anything but joy.”

"They were so young—"

"They loved each other—"

"We couldn't be sure of that. Boys and girls of that age often mistake other emotions for love, Mrs. Paris. The divorce courts are kept busy by misguided young people who—"

"Oh, no, they're not. They're kept busy by misguided parents like you and me. Good parents can discourage an unsuitable marriage for their children as easily as they can promote a happy one. But they can't do it with lies. That old minister last summer—he saw through us. He knew Lora and Judd would never have gone to him—if we hadn't driven them to him. And he knew we were tricking them. Everything that has happened since then has been more our fault than theirs." She looked straight into his eyes. "This may sound hard, but you'll notice I'm not sparing myself. I've been just as blind and stupid as you have."

He cleared his throat, his eyes wavered from hers, "I admit that much of what you say is, unfortunately, true. However—"

"But it was more your fault than ours," Julia said, "because we never disliked Judd as you did Lora. We thought he was a dear boy and we still think so. And, now that you've turned him out, I'm going to make it my business to find him. If he and Lora still love each other, I no longer see any reason why

they shouldn't marry." She stood up, flung out her hands in a gesture of finality. "That is what I meant when I said that if you hadn't come here, I should have hunted you up—to tell you this."

He got to his feet, too, his face was as flushed, his eyes as defiant as her own. "And why do you think I came here—to return your daughter's drawings that any messenger could have brought? Do you suppose you're the only one to discover that we've been blind and stupid, as you express it! And you talk of finding Judd! Do you think *I* haven't tried to do that? I believed he was already married to your daughter—but I've tried to find him all the same. I appealed to your husband but he refused to see me, refused to read my letters—"

"Naturally!" Julia said crisply.

"I've even employed detectives. Mrs. Paris, I can't—find—my son! That's why I came here—to ask you to help me."

His chin dropped lower between his sagging shoulders; he seemed to be shrinking into something ineffably old and fleshless before Julia's very eyes and she laid her hand on his shoulder with quick compassion. "I'm sorry—sit down again, please. I didn't realize—of course, I'll help. And we're sure to find him."

"Today when I saw Lora—I thought my heart would never beat again. I was so sure I had found

him—that she would know—” he stopped, smiled at her sadly. “She called me a beast.”

“She was terribly shocked and upset. She wouldn’t have done such a thing otherwise.”

“I wouldn’t have cared what she called me—if she had only told me where to find my son.”

“Don’t worry, Mr. Harcott. People can’t just drop out of existence—”

“But that’s what he has done. I traced him to the pawnshop where he pawned his suitcases. Beyond that—nothing—nothing. It’s killing his mother—she doesn’t know I’ve been searching for him, she still feels—or pretends to feel—that we couldn’t have acted differently, but it’s killing her all the same.”

Julia looked at him, slumped there in his chair and her tears brimmed over. “We’ll find him all right,” she said. “Lora will find him—you know the old saying, ‘Love will find a way.’ ”

He nodded. “Yes, I thought of that, too,” he said.

Chapter 15

AFTERWARD, WHEN LORA LOOKED BACK ON those days, it seemed strange and pitiful to remember that not once had she doubted she would find Judd. She had but to release her need of him and he would be sure to come. That was the way she thought of it in the beginning when she was free to think of it. She had not felt quite free to think of it until she had disposed of Ollie Hard. She had felt terribly guilty about poor Ollie.

But Ollie had taken his congé as lightly and good-humoredly as he had always taken everything, as Julia had predicted he would. It wasn't, as Julia had pointed out, as though he had really loved her. He was alone in a foreign country, in just the mood to marry any nice girl. "Be perfectly frank with him, precious. Ollie's a man of the world—he'll understand."

Ollie had understood everything, he had even made Lora feel, by some legerdemain of his blithe spirit, that she had done him a favor, not by jilting him but by letting him in on what he said was undoubtedly the renaissance of true romance.

“After all, I fell for you because of your extraordinary constancy to another man, so why should I complain?” he said that memorable night at Foyot’s. “And of course, it had to end this way—parents reconciled, dying mother restored to health, lovers reunited! Why should I fly in the face of a tradition like that?”

“We’re not reunited yet, Ollie.”

“Pooh! That’s a mere technicality. Slip out on your balcony one night and cry, ‘Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou, my Romeo!’ and watch him come!”

She laughed, but the picture this evoked filled her eyes with light, her cheeks with color.

And so it wasn’t hard to dispose of Ollie at all. As he said, it had been a purely business arrangement, either partner had been at liberty to back out. He was very gay and looked very distinguished in his dinner clothes with his dark head sleek, his dark cheeks flushed with just a shade too much wine perhaps. But his gay insouciance reduced the whole affair to a trifle.

When he said good night to her in the dark courtyard of the Pension, he had asked her to kiss him good-by. “It’s the second-best man’s privilege to kiss the bride, darling, and since I probably won’t be able to attend your nuptials, couldn’t you make me a small advance?”

She had lifted her face readily enough and he had cupped it gently between his hands as a woman cups a rose and stooped and kissed her lips. "Good-by, little bride—be happy!"

The Parises sailed for home the following week and, by some machinations of fate or perhaps of Bailey Harcott, the Harcotts took passage on the same ship. Marie knew the story of that meeting in the *parc*, now, and that Julia and her husband were conspiring to find her son but the knowledge had not affected her as Bailey had hoped and expected it would. She acknowledged the Paris family's presence on board with the most distant of nods and then took to her bed. "I really think it has made her hate us worse than ever," Julia told her husband when she was telling him the story. "I believe she'd almost rather never have Judd back at all than have him marry Lora. And she's dying of grief—she looks terribly. It's killing her."

"It's her pride that's killing her, poor woman," George said and hugged his wife hungrily. "But she'll come round—we were almost as bad—but we'll soon have this business straightened out, now."

For he had already begun elaborate sleuthing operations, had already picked up Judd's scent. True it had carried him no farther than it had carried Mr. Harcott, thus far, but George said, "You wait, the kid'll turn up all right." It was his favorite

phrase during the next few weeks, especially in his daughter's presence. He said it more and more loudly and emphatically— "He'll turn up, pet! You wait!"

And Lora waited, living on hope, comforted by the thought that she and her family were united in a common cause once more. They understood, the past was wiped out. She had the *right* to love Judd now. Her face grew smaller, her eyes bigger. "Judd, Judd, where are you, darling? Don't you know that everything is all right now? Can't you feel it?"

"You wait! You just wait—"

That was the summer of nineteen-thirty-four and presently it was nineteen-thirty-five and then thirty-six. Young people stopped dancing to the *Boulevard of Broken Dreams* and the orchestras played *Speak to Me of Love* and, a little later, *Red Sails in the Sunset*. Hats grew smaller and funnier and short-haired girls wore false braids around their heads as their mothers had done before them. George Paris's business prospered and he bought a house in a fashionable neighborhood which Julia promptly turned into a cozy, unfashionable home. Hay had begun to shave and was looking forward to Yale and Cliff Sidney was proving a valuable asset to his father's brokerage business. Lois had gone straight from

college to the altar with the boy who had faithfully supplied her with chocolates for four years and Joan had taken to novel writing.

Lora had commercialized her flair for "drawing pictures" and for nearly a year now had been luring the customers of a smart shop with her gay sketches of ladies' fashions. Her girlhood was gone and Judd Harcott was gone. Sometimes it seemed to her that she had dreamed him. She was a woman now, her thick curls disciplined to a glossy cap, her fair skin that had once burned and freckled so easily, smooth and clear as the surface of a pearl. But she had developed a habit of silence and preoccupation that at once attracted and repelled friendship. Few young men took her out twice for few young men like to waste their words and their charms—even on a beautiful woman. And so, lovely as she was, Lora was not "popular" and there were times when she was very lonely. But she was busy and she no longer consciously mourned for Judd and her lost ecstasies.

In the fall, nearly two years after she had come home from France, Ollie Hard made a flying visit to America and came to see her. They had been corresponding sporadically for a year. When some of Lora's sketches had appeared in a magazine, he had seen them and written to congratulate her. "So you've turned into one of these career girls, now," he commented gaily. Later he wrote that he was

coming home for a visit. "If you hear of a lunatic trying to leap off the ship into the arms of the Statue of Liberty, don't think too badly of me, darling!"

He appeared one evening at the Paris house preceded by a bottle of champagne and a box of orchids. Lora pinned the orchids on the shoulder of her black velvet hostess gown when she went down to greet him. He took both her hands and looked her over from the top of her fluted amber head to the toe of the velvet sandal showing beneath her trailing skirt, and shook his head ruefully. "I knew it! I knew you'd go and grow up elegant on me!"

She laughed and told him she was glad to see him, which was true. He looked much the same, a little older, of course. The lines around his mouth and eyes had deepened, his grin was a little more quizzical, but his spirit seemed as blithe, his manner was as inconsequent as it had been the night they had parted nearly two years before. Neither of them spoke of that, Lora had feared Ollie might, that he might even mention Judd, for of course he knew the story had not "turned out right" after all. But he surprised her by being tactful and impersonal. They talked of Lora's job and of Coureville where, he said, they'd had so much rain this summer that the old Château ghost had gone on strike and refused to appear.

"I don't blame it," Lora said.

"It was pretty hard on the tourist trade," he said gravely. "Tourists dote on ghosts. I offered myself as a substitute attraction—I wasn't going to dress up in a sheet and moan or anything like that, you understand. But I did think the sight of an American bachelor who had survived nearly two years of Coureville was easily worth fifty centimes a head."

"I should think it *was!*" she said.

He left next day for the Hard plant upstate and a visit with his parents. But he would be in town again for three or four days before he sailed, he said, and he made Lora promise that she would reserve those days for him. "We'll go places and do things—I've got to make up for my two years' exile and fortify myself against another two."

And so when he came back they went places and did things, expensive gay places and things, every hour Lora could spare from her job. He kept the house filled with flowers, thereby winning Julia's heart, and George liked him, too. Sometimes Lora would come home from her office and find him sitting smoking and discussing iceboxes and politics with her father. George said, "He's a nut, but you can't help liking him."

On the night before he sailed, Lora said she was too tired to go dancing and they came straight home after the theatre. They went down to the deserted

kitchen and found some beer on the ice and sat at the kitchen table and ate bread and cheese and drank beer. Ollie said, "This is grand. Nothing like cozy domestic pleasures, after all, is there?"

"If you'll stay over another day, we'll have a taffy pulling party tomorrow night," Lora said.

But he shook his head. "It's going to be hard enough as it is to return to my lonely exile."

She said, "If you're lonely, it's your own fault."

"I know," he said. "I could have had half a dozen girls in Coureville but the prospect of quarreling in French kind of scared me off." He drained his glass and set it down sadly. "I'd kind of planned to look over some prospects here when I came home, but I've been so busy—you don't happen to know of anyone who might answer my purpose, do you?"

She had been sitting with her elbows propped on the table, her chin on her hands, looking at him with that wide, preoccupied gaze of hers. But now her gaze focused and she saw that there was a terrible urgency in his dark eyes. She shook her head, said lightly, "Not at the moment. I'll keep it in mind, though."

"I don't want to be too optimistic," he said. "But I think I could even guarantee the ghost—he ought to be dried out soon." And then he leaned across the table and touched her hand. "*You* wouldn't reconsider my offer, would you, Lora?"

She shoved back her chair and laughed. "Now you *are* being foolish!"

"I suppose I am," he said. "I suppose maybe that's gotten to be a habit. So have you—I mean, thinking about you and kind of hoping— You see you spoiled me for any other girl, darling, and when I heard—well, that there wasn't anybody else—there isn't anybody else now, is there, Lora?"

"No," she said, "there isn't anybody else, now—but there is my job."

"Your boss could easily find someone to take your place. I can't."

She was not deceived by that careless insouciance now. She could have cried for him. Instead she shook her head and tried to smile. "I'm terribly flattered, Ollie—not by what you said about my job—"

"I didn't mean to belittle your job, darling, but think how much more suitable mine would be!"

She began, "I'm not at all sure of that," but he stopped her, jumping up, coming around the table to her chair.

"I am, Lora. I'm *sure*. So were you once, remember? Remember how we both thought what a swell idea it was? Well, I still think it is. Why can't we go on from there—as though nothing had happened to interfere? Come back to Coureville with me—I'll see you don't regret it!"

His face under the hard, bright kitchen lights was

strained and white and she could feel the tension of his body as he stood there waiting. She realized suddenly how fond of him she was, as fond of him, perhaps, as most women were of the men they married. She could not hope for more than this, she could never hope for the ecstasies she had squandered in her youth.

"I—I don't know what to say, Ollie."

"It begins with a Y and ends with an S," he said and dropped to his knees beside her chair and took her hands in his. "And there's an E in the middle. Say it, darling."

She shook her head. "I—I really wish I could. But I can't."

"Why? You said there was no one else. It isn't—it can't be that other affair, is it, Lora? That's all over, isn't it? He never did show up, did he?"

"No. He never did show up."

"Then it can't be—you *can't* still be waiting, my dear—after all this time! You can't! That's not fair! It's not fair to yourself."

She said, in an agony of trying to put into words something she had never put into words before, "I've got to be fair to *him*. I'm not still waiting—not really waiting, Ollie. But don't you see, if Judd is still alive and if he's hungry or ill or lonely, it's because of me."

"Nonsense!"

She gave him a sad little smile. "It does sound like nonsense, doesn't it? But it's true. I can't forget that it was through me he was cheated out of everything that was rightfully his, everything he deserved. I don't often think of him any more. I don't even know that he'd feel at all the same about me if he did come back—or that I would feel the same about him. But he *might*—and until I *know*—whether he's all right or—or dead, I won't ever feel free to marry anyone else."

He said, "My dear girl, if you'd any idea how morbid all that sounds, you would never say it. Letting something that happened when you were a schoolgirl ruin your whole life—make a lonely old maid of you—and an embittered bachelor of me!" He took her by the shoulders and shook her gently from side to side. "Wake up, darling! This is almost nineteen-thirty-six! These things aren't done! Beautiful ladies no longer burn candles in their windows to light their lost loves home and die old maids in their yellowed wedding dresses! How do you suppose that lost love of yours would feel if he knew you were wasting your life because of him? I'll tell you how he'd feel! He'd feel it was pretty doggone mean of you, making him responsible! That's how he'd feel, darling!"

Flashes of hot color flared in her cheeks. "You think you're being terribly clever, don't you?"

“I’m doing my darnedest! Lora, Lora, will you see sense—and marry me?”

“I—I don’t know. I’ll think about it—” He reached for her but she held him off. “No, please! You’ll have to be patient, Ollie. But—if you’ll wait a little longer—say until Spring—if I feel then that it’s all right and you still want me—”

Chapter 16

IT WAS STILL RAINING IN COUREVILLE WHEN Ollie Hard returned. The little town was sodden, the fronts of the stone houses glassy with wet, the cobbled streets oozing slush and mud. Though fires burned in every room. Ollie's old walled house reeked with must and dampness and when he drove out to his office at the plant beyond the town walls, his light car slithered and skidded dangerously in the muddy roads.

But Ollie was happier than he had ever been in his nearly thirty years of life. He whistled more, drank less and wooed his customers with such beguiling charm that they were amazed to find it still raining when they left him. Once or twice a month he drove to Marseilles where he dined sometimes with American friends or went to the theatre or simply ambled happily around the streets, absorbing their noisy excitement and dreaming of Spring and Lora.

He was fond of strolling about the *vieux port*, where he could see the ships at anchor in the *râde*

beyond the great V-shaped breakwater or of stopping for an *oportó* at some sidewalk café on the old Place de la Joliette, always aswarm with a hundred varieties of *sans-sous*—penniless sailors, stevedores, ragged beachcombers. He sat thus one late December afternoon sipping his watery wine and enjoying the first watery rays of sun he had seen in weeks. In the center of the *place* a ship's officer was signing on a crew from a crowd of milling, shouting men.

Ollie was watching them amusedly and thinking it was as well that a ship's passengers did not know the quality of her crew when a swarthy little man broke from the crush, started running across the *place*. He had not covered ten yards when another man was after him. The pursuer's legs were longer than the swarthy man's, they rose and fell like pistons and as he ran he roared in as forceful and picturesque a mixture of French and English as Ollie had ever heard.

"*Au voleur!* Hey, come back here with that or I'll wring your dirty neck— *Holla!* Pig of a pig, halt, or I'll slit your throat from ear to ear—hey! Stop thief! *Holla—*"

A narrow alley ran alongside the café before which Ollie sat and it was clear the swarthy man knew this. As he approached the café, Ollie automatically rose and braced himself. He had no desire to get himself mixed up with that unpalatable looking pair but

after all, the long-legged man sounded suspiciously like one of his own countrymen and it is second nature for an honest man to stop a thief—though no one else in the *place* appeared aware of this. As the swarthy man made a dive for the alley, Ollie shot out his arm and the thief went down with a force that must have loosened his teeth.

His pursuer was on him in a moment. They rolled over and over on the muddy cobbles snarling like infuriated dogs. Ollie stood by, a little uncertain what to do next and then he caught sight of the knife in the swarthy man's hand. He yelled, "Look out, Yank!" and leaped into the fray.

When they finally captured the knife, it had left its mark on them both; on the long-legged man's cheek and on Ollie's wrist. But they had effectually subdued the thief; he lay in the mud grinning wickedly as Yank went plunging through his ragged pockets. Finally Yank gave a grunt of satisfaction, drew out his hand and opened it for Ollie to see. In the palm lay a plain gold ring. Ollie thought it looked like a wedding ring.

"Is that what he stole from you?"

Yank nodded, panting. "The dirty little rat!"

"What are we going to do with him?"

Yank considered that, eyeing the perfectly mute grinning face on the ground between them. "Well, I've got my ring so I guess I'll just give him a kick

in the pants and let him go. Come on, baby! Upsy-daisy!" He dragged the thief to his feet, turned him around and lifted his foot. It was shod in as dilapidated a shoe as Ollie had seen in a long time, but there was power behind it. The swarthy man went catapulting into the alley like a tossed ball. Yank watched him go, pocketed the ring and grinned at Ollie. "That'll do him more good than turning him over to the gendarmerie. Thanks for nabbing him—thanks a lot."

"That's all right. You've got a pretty bad cut on your cheek."

Yank inspected the cheek with a soiled forefinger and looked at the blood on Ollie's hand. "Say, he carved you up, too!"

"Oh, mine isn't bad, but I think we'd better go over to the chemist and let him clean us up. Can't tell what was on that knife."

"You'd better do that. I'll be all right. I've got to—" he whirled and looked into the *place*, but the ship's officer was gone, the crowd scattering. "Hell, that so and so cheated me out of a berth."

"Well, now there's no reason why you shouldn't come along and get that thing washed up." The Yank demurred but Ollie insisted. "Don't be a fool. If it's the cost you're worrying about, it's my treat. I haven't had so much fun in a dog's age. Come along—then we'll have a drink, eh?"

Fifteen minutes later they were back at the café table, their wounds nicely dressed, drinking an *oportó* together. Ollie suspected his guest would have enjoyed something more substantial for his unshaven cheeks were too hollow, his sunken brown eyes had the glazed look common to men who have had too little food and sleep. But, despite his muddy corduroy trousers and shabby seaman's coat, there was a jaunty air of independence about him. And so Ollie ordered only the *oportó*, for the ethics that forbid a proud beggar to accept a meal will always permit him to accept a drink.

Yank explained about the theft. "He happened to see me drop the ring at Dirty Joe's this morning—place I've been putting up—and like a fool I put it back in the same pocket."

"And that crowd gave him the chance he was waiting for," Ollie said and then carelessly, "Are you a sailor?"

The Yank grinned. "I'm anything that happens to need a pair of hands."

Ollie said, "You're from the States, aren't you?"

"How'd you guess?"

"Intuition," Ollie said. "Been over here long?"

"Here and a lot of other places."

"The old itching foot, eh?"

The Yank's grin widened. "That's it." The *oportó* had brought color up under the dark stub-

ble of his beard, given a brighter polish to his brown eyes. "It's a great life."

"If your shoes hold out," Ollie said dryly and then, before his guest could answer, "Why don't you get a regular job and settle down?"

The Yank tipped back his chair and wagged his head sadly. "That's the worst of you good citizens. You never meet up with a free spirit that you don't want to put it in a clean shirt and chain it up in four walls."

Ollie said good-naturedly, "I know, but I kind of hate to see an able-bodied American like you knocking around with all this dirty scum. As a matter of fact, I could use a man like you."

Yank laughed outright. "Thanks—but how do you know you could? How do you know what kind of a man I am?"

"Well, I know you can fight and I've heard you curse in two languages. They'd be useful talents in an American shop employing a bunch of French workmen."

Yank lowered the front legs of his chair. "You mean you've got a shop over here—in France?"

"Place called Coureville—about twenty kilometers from here. We manufacture electric iceboxes, vacuum cleaners—that sort of thing. Some of the parts we make over here, some are sent over from the home plant—got quite a business. You said you were

looking for a berth, why not come out to Coureville—let's see what you can do?"

The Yank's eyes were on his glass. "I've been kind of on the lookout for something over here—I mean, I haven't got any particular yen to go back to the States—feel more at home over here, as a matter of fact. But I don't know a damn thing about iceboxes."

Ollie looked at his watch and stood up. "Well, you could learn. If you feel like giving it a try, come out and see me. A bus comes out two-three times a day—just ask for Hard. Oliver Hard's my name—got a card here somewhere."

"Mine's Harris," the Yank said, taking the card from Ollie. "And thanks. I'll be seeing you tomorrow, then."

But, as Ollie told Lora when he was writing her of his adventure the following evening, he never expected to see his free spirit again—

"—so you may imagine my surprise to find him wandering around the shop when I got out there this morning. I knew it was too early for the first bus—the poor devil must have done the twenty kilometers on foot. I imagine he was getting fed up with the free life. He hadn't any visible luggage outside of a paper package, so I advanced him a little money and got him a room at old Madame Raymond's—I suppose the next thing he'll be murdering her in her bed and walking off with the silver—"

When Lora answered that letter, her tone was warmer than it had been before—

“Even if he turns out to be a thief or a murderer you’ve done something pretty wonderful. But what a fraud you are, Ollie! Here you’ve been posing as a hard-boiled cynic and all the time you were just a darling old big-hearted softie—”

That set Ollie up, made him regard his vagabond with an even more tender eye. And the free spirit of the Place de la Joliette in a clean shirt and sound shoes, shaved and brushed, was a more heartening sight than his new boss could have believed possible. Only time and good food could fill out the hollowed cheeks, nothing but a regular application of soap and water could wash the grime from those hardened hands, but even so John Harris was beginning to look like a respectable citizen. “A darned good-looking boy,” he wrote Lora proudly. “Can’t be more than twenty-four or five.”

Her praise was so sweet that his letters during the next few weeks had a good deal to say of his new employee—how intelligent he was, how well he was taking hold of things—

“—I’ve been using him in the office lately. He’s more useful to me there than in the shop. Of course I’ve known from the first he was no ordinary bum. It’s my guess he’s a college man—though he’s never said so, never mentions his past at all, but I figure he got into

some scrape at home and probably his wife left him and he lit out in a huff, kid-like. This is only a guess, of course, but I'm almost certain that ring was a wedding ring.

"Darling, can you smell the Spring over there? It's already here—my fig trees are in bloom and Jacques has planted *les haricots* and the ghost appeared on the north turret of the château last night. You remember I promised you the ghost—"

When Lora had read that letter over and over, she took it down to the living room where her father and mother were sitting, reading the paper and waiting for dinner to be announced. George glanced up over the top of his glasses and said "Hello, pet!" and Julia said, "What have you got there, dear?" and suddenly laid down her paper and sat up straight, realizing that Lora had not changed her office dress, sensing from the look on her daughter's face that something was wrong. "What is it, darling?"

"I want you to read this, mum—you, too, dad, please. It's from Ollie. You remember my telling you how he picked up a tramp in Marseilles last winter? Well, I think it's Judd."

George and Julia exchanged a quick look and, together, read Ollie's letter. Then Julia said gently, "But my dearest, there are hundreds of boys like that drifting around the world."

"I know," Lora said. "It seems absurd for me to

feel so sure. But I do. I feel positive it's Judd. I was almost sure the last time Ollie wrote—now this—about the ring—”

“Yes, there's that,” Julia said. “What do you think, dad?”

George shook his head. “I suppose it could be Judd Harcott just as easily as it could be John Jones—or Harris. It's possible but not probable. But if Lora feels this way, we'd better look into it.” He got up. “Have you kept those other letters of Ollie's, kitten?” Lora said she had and George said, “Well, why not bring 'em down and let your mother and me look 'em over?”

When she had gone up for the letters, Julia turned tensely to her husband. “It couldn't be, could it, dear? But, oh, if it only *were* Judd! If she could just *know*!”

“Wouldn't mind knowing myself,” George said.

When they had gone carefully over Ollie's letters, read and re-read every reference to the redeemed free spirit, they had no more reason for believing that John Harris was Judd Harcott than they had had before—but they did believe it, nevertheless. George Paris still refused to admit this, repeated that it was one chance in a million— “But it's easy enough to find out,” he said, “easy enough for Ollie to find out, that is. If I were you, Lora, I'd get a letter right off to him. And I'll drop a line to Bailey Harcott.

I gave him my word I'd let him know the minute anything new turned up."

Julia said, "But wouldn't that be premature, dear? It might not be Judd at all and it's so awful to raise their hopes—"

"Pooh, it's hope that keeps us alive," George said. "They've a right to know as much as we know."

So, while Lora was writing Ollie, George wrote Bailey Harcott and three nights later, Judd's father and mother appeared at the Paris house.

Julia and George and Lora were in the living room, the meeting between the two families who had not met since their return from Europe, was casual and urbane enough though Julia was shocked by the change in Marie Harcott. Her once heavy figure was painfully thin, cheeks flabby under their skillful makeup, her restive eyes sunk in dark pouches. But she still held herself proudly, her voice had the old imperious ring.

She said, "Oddly enough, we were planning a trip to New York and when your letter came we thought we might as well come now as later."

"I'm glad you did," Julia said warmly. "If only we haven't raised your hopes too high."

"Oh, dear, no. As I've been telling Bailey for two years now, when Judd's ready to come home, he'll come, never fear!"

Which made it clear that the change in Marie Har-

cott did not extend beyond the physical. This became more and more apparent as they talked. It was Bailey who pressed them for particulars, who listened with heart-breaking intensity while Lora read the references to John Harris from Ollie's letters. Marie sat with her eyes on the purse in her lap, occasionally she would shake her head, or lift an incredulous shoulder or drop a comment— "Of course that might mean anything—or nothing." When the wedding ring was mentioned, she said, "Isn't it a bit too romantic to suppose he would have kept that all this time?"

When Lora had finished, she folded the letters and said quietly, speaking to Mr. Harcott, "It's just a hunch—perfectly illogical and unreasonable—but I *feel* it's Judd."

"I'm inclined to agree," George Paris said. "He's Judd's age, his description answers Judd's. It all seems to add up."

Julia said, "Well, we'll know soon. Lora ought to hear from Ollie in a week or so. She asked him to cable her."

Bailey Harcott got to his feet, began to pace the floor. "I don't see why we shouldn't cable *him*. What's this man, Har's address? After all, why wait? Besides—well, Judd's sensitive—and he's proud. He won't know what our attitude is toward him and if this man begins to question him, he might

light out again. Now if we cable him and tell him everything's okay—"

"Simply cable him to come home at once and stop being ridiculous," Marie said. "Tell him—well, that all is forgiven—something like that!"

"I'd rather you didn't do that, Mrs. Harcott," Lora said.

They all turned to stare at her in astonishment and Marie Harcott's face went scarlet. "*You'd* rather I didn't do it!"

"I don't think Judd needs to be forgiven," Lora said. "Neither of us want to be forgiven—I think we've expiated our sins."

"Are you dictating what I should say to my own son?"

"This man may not be your son."

"That's for me to find out!"

"No," Lora said gently, "it's for me to find out and I've done what I've thought was wise. I've written Mr. Hard who understands everything and who will make Judd—if it *is* Judd—understand everything and leave him free to come home or to stay—to do what he thinks is best."

Marie was leaning forward in her chair, her big white hands spread on the arms. She cried, "Who are you to decide what is wise—"

"I might have been his wife," Lora said. "I never was. I may never be. But we're adults now. I

think we've earned the right to be free—to make our own decisions—without interference.”

Julia said, “Lora! Lora, darling!”

Marie's hoarse voice drowned out that gentle protest. “Do you realize you're talking to his mother!”

“Yes,” Lora said, her face white as the white cluster of flowers at the throat of her black frock, “but you sent him away from you on my account. That makes me responsible for him, don't you see?”

“In short, you refuse to give us that address so that I can cable my own son!”

Lora slid forward in her chair, her hands clasped tight, like a little girl in prayer. “I'm afraid to give it to you—please, please don't ask me! I don't mean to be rude—but you can't realize what this means to me, Mrs. Harcott—after all these years of being bound—more closely bound than if Judd and I had really gone through with that marriage ceremony. You can't know what it means to be almost a wife and almost a widow—without ever having been either!”

“And you think,” Marie Harcott said, shaking, “you actually believe that after all this time you two are going to feel the same about each other?”

“I don't *know*! That's what I'm trying to tell you! How *can* I know—I don't suppose Judd knows, either, but I do know that we must have the chance to find out—for ourselves!”

"She's right," Bailey Harcott burst out suddenly. "Perfectly right. It's time we laid off, Marie. If this fellow is Judd, it's her first privilege to know it. Let's give 'em a chance to settle their score before we butt in. After all, if it's Judd, it's Lora who has found him for us—"

"And for—herself," Marie Harcott said, getting the words out with a terrible effort but managing to invest them with a note of playful indulgence. "Which, I suppose, is—quite natural! Well!" She stood up, wagged her head with playful solemnity at Lora. "I hadn't realized—that love's young dream—could be so enduring." She actually went to Lora and gave the bright head a little pat. "I suppose all mothers must expect to take second place in their children's hearts sometime, my dear."

Julia had to clap her hand over her mouth to keep from shouting, "Bravo! Old Girl!" and George said heartily, "Second place your grandmother. It's merely a question of sharing—"

A few days after that, Lora received Ollie's cable. It read—

"Harcott is the name and is my face red stop Out of all the tramps floating around the world I had to pick the lost lover stop I would stop Well I might have known I was only a cog in the wheel of destiny stop And I am flattered that for once in my life I was permitted to play a role worthy of my heroic talents stop. Your

boy friend has been suffering from bad inferiority complex but now he knows all is well is recovering and will probably be with you shortly stop Now the story is complete and who am I to begrudge it the happy ending stop Blessings my children—Ollie.”

Lora forwarded that cable to Mrs. Harcott after she had cried over it a little. Her tears were for Ollie, not for Judd! She had *known* that John Harris was Judd. But she smiled a little bitterly at Ollie’s assumption that the happy ending had now been achieved. As though she and Judd could so easily bridge those dreadful years, as though they could so easily renew the sweet and terrible ecstasy of their youth. No, they were man and woman, not boy and girl, now, and as man and woman they were free at last to know their own hearts.

Lora did not know hers. She could not tell how she would feel when she met Judd again. But the emotional inertia that had held her was lifted now, excitement stirred in her, lent new zest to every new day. Riding to her office on the bus, lying staring at her ceiling at night after the light was out, she would picture that meeting with Judd. She would be in her room, perhaps, and the maid would come up and say, “Mr. Harcott is calling, Miss Lora.” She would be wearing her sapphire gown, perhaps, and she would see herself with Judd’s eyes, coming down the stairs with the light on her hair and her long

skirts trailing. He would say, "Why, Lora! Is it really you, my dear!" Or she would be coming back from the opera and the tall strange young man waiting on the hall sofa would rise up at sight of the strange young woman in her furred evening wrap and the flowers on her shoulder. "Lora—!"

She never got beyond that first greeting, never knew how *she* felt nor what *she* said—

One day early in May she hopped off the Lexington Avenue bus and started up the quiet block of brownstone houses toward her own house. It had been an unseasonably hot day and she was fagged and sticky in her tweed business suit. The collar of her blouse had wilted, her head was hot under her felt sports hat and she dragged it off and carried it in her hand along with her heavy portfolio.

As she approached her house she saw a man come out and start down the street. He passed her, walking rapidly, then turned and caught up with her again. When he was abreast of her, he said, "I beg your pardon but aren't you—well, Lora!"

She glanced up at him none too cordially and could not take her eyes off that remembered face—a little thinner, a little older, but the same ruddy brown hair growing back thick and crisp from the temples, the same warm ruddy brown eyes, the same smile—a little tremulous, now. "Why—Judd!"

"I—gosh! I didn't know you for a minute—and

that's funny," he said, his eyes swinging over her—so young and slender in the utilitarian suit and boyish collar, mussed hair bright in the sunshine—"because you—you haven't changed a bit!"

"Neither have you. I—where did you come from—I mean when did you—"

"I just landed this afternoon. Here, let me carry that—I've already been to the house, been talking to your mother. She said you wouldn't be along for an hour or so so I thought I'd go get a shave—" and he ran an apologetic hand over his cheek. "I hated to take time out—"

"Just today—you just landed! Well, I—I hardly expected—come on in—" She had some difficulty getting the key in its lock. She was wondering if her own face was as dirty as it felt, thinking, "Nothing ever does happen right—" She said, "I'm dirty as a pig—it's been terribly hot in the office." But it was cool in the spacious hall of the house, cool and deserted. She slammed the door behind them, said, "Sit down while I run up and—"

"Wait—just a minute," his hand was on her arm, turning her around. "I—I just want to—look at you."

The touch of his hand took all the strength out of her. Her heart began to beat so hard and fast that she thought it would suffocate her. But it couldn't be like this—after three years! *It couldn't!*

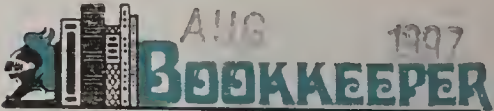
"I—I'll be—right down—"

“Lora?” he said very softly, a breathless question, his face bending to hers, his hand drawing her toward him. “Lora—dear?”

She lifted her eyes and they looked at each other, a look full of fear and hope and wonder. Then Lora drew a long, sobbing breath and his arms closed round her. “Lora, little Lora without the U!”

And she had thought it would take so long because now they were grown up. She had forgotten that love never grows up.

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